

A Study of Nonfans and Fans of the National Lacrosse League's Edmonton

Rush

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Dedication

I dedicate this research project to Mr. Brian Walser. Your ingenious qualities and dedication as a teacher enhanced my development as a child and youth. I am the person I am today because of the impact you had on my life. I will forever be grateful for everything you have done for me and thank you for introducing me to the fastest game on two feet.

Abstract

The National Lacrosse League (NLL) is floundering. In an attempt to understand why NLL fans attend games and other sport fans do not, the NLL's Edmonton Rush were studied. To best address the NLL's attendance woes, two primary research questions were developed: 1) Why do fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings choose not to attend Edmonton Rush games? 2) Why do fans of the Edmonton Rush attend games? To answer these questions an online focus group along with a document analysis of Rush media, and a telephone interview were used to collect data.

The data collection methods mentioned above assisted in answering the primary and secondary research questions, which allowed three major themes along with sub-themes to inductively emerge. The nonfans of the Rush do not attend Rush games because of the connection they have with hockey and the disconnection they have with lacrosse, some are simply not interested or were not entertained, as well as the lack of exposure the Rush receive. The Rush fan participants attend Rush games because of Edmonton community pride, the entertainment value they get out of attending a game, it is a great alternative new sport experience and it either is a substitute or a compliment to hockey. Both the nonfan and fan participants of this study believe that different marketing approaches can be utilized in order to attract nonfans to attend games.

Preface

Before enlightening readers on this research project, I feel that background knowledge on how I have developed my love and passion for lacrosse is significant to discuss. I was introduced to the sport of lacrosse by my grade three teacher, Mr. Brian Walser. Mr. Walser was very involved with our elementary school; he coached me in cross country as well as basketball. When I was in grade five, Mr. Walser approached me as well as my parents to play lacrosse for the bantam team he coached. Not only did he just want me to play on his team but he wanted me to play goalie on his all boys box lacrosse team. To this day, I still do not know what he saw in me at ten years old to be able to play in net for a bunch of boys but all I know is that I am glad he saw what he saw. Before I could play on the team Mr. Walser wanted to discuss the opportunity with my parents. He came over to our house to talk to my parents and me about the sport of lacrosse and the benefits the game has to offer. My dad was the first to say, “people who play lacrosse have rocks in their heads.” Now fifteen years later, you cannot pull my dad away from the sport.

Without Mr. Walser I would have never have even thought of participating in lacrosse, but I am so grateful that he asked me to play. Lacrosse has been a major part of my life. I do not think I remember one summer where I was not travelling around Ontario to lacrosse tournaments and games. My brother began to play the year after I started playing, my parents became involved with our minor association, and when I was eighteen I started to coach. I coached three seasons for my minor association and I loved every minute of it. I played box lacrosse until I was 21, after that there was really no league for a girl box goalie to play in within Ontario, so it was then that I moved onto

field lacrosse.

I probably would not have ever played women's field lacrosse if it were not for my boyfriend who played field lacrosse for the varsity men's team at Brock University. I came from a small town and we only had box lacrosse; there was never any field lacrosse league. At 21, when I thought my playing days were over, I began a new chapter playing in net for the women's team in St. Catharines. Although box and field lacrosse are very different, especially when you have played on both a male and female team, my passion for the game has never been stronger. I have not only played on a boys box team and women's field team but I have also coached and managed box and field teams as well.

My involvement in lacrosse, whether it be as a player, coach, manager, or spectator has continuously developed my passion for the game, which is why I wanted to conduct this research project. I feel lacrosse is not getting the recognition it deserves. I wanted to help change that and provide the opportunity for people to fall in love with the sport just like myself and others I know within the lacrosse community already have.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sport marketing has become a very dynamic and complex competency that has evolved immensely throughout the years and is a key strategic means of survival for organizations in the sport industry. Sport marketing involves meeting the wants and needs of the sport consumer through exchange processes and is unique because many consumers are regarded as experts within the sport industry (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). As the marketing of sport becomes a crucial component to organizations and their surrounding environments, sport marketing will continue to have effects on the sport consumers and their behaviours. Furthermore, because satisfying the sport consumer is such an integral component of sport marketing, sport marketers must continually address the arising gaps in knowledge if they want their sport organizations to stay competitive. Therefore, this research project has taken an interpretive approach to address gaps in the sport marketing knowledge by examining nonfans and fans of the National Lacrosse League's (NLL) Edmonton Rush through the utilization of an online focus group.

The State of Lacrosse

Lacrosse is a fast paced, high intensity, and an extremely skilful sport. The game of lacrosse has similar attributes to the sports of hockey as well as basketball and it transcends economic background, race, and occupation (Elickson, 2007). The sport of lacrosse is an uncommon topic in sport management literature; however, lacrosse is addressed within other fields of study such as history or medicine (i.e., Dick, Romani, Agel, Case, & Marshall, 2007; Jetson, 2009; Poulter, 2003; Robidoux, 2002; Schyfter, 2008). The business of lacrosse in the sport management literature has yet to be addressed as there is minimal, if any literature that concentrates on the NLL. The management of

lacrosse is important because the NLL was established in 1987 but has yet to identify with the Big Four major leagues: National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB). In fact, a majority of NLL franchises are unable to attract enough spectators to fill the seating capacities of the venues the franchises play out of.

The NLL is the professional league for indoor lacrosse in North America combining the rules of box lacrosse with the rules of field lacrosse. Although the NLL is considered the professional league for the sport, it cannot be considered a major league because the NLL players are not getting paid enough money to make a living and have to pursue other careers. It is common for many NLL players to have fulltime careers outside of lacrosse. Moreover, it is typical that these careers are not located in the city where they play. Many NLL teams fly in players for the weekend so that they are able to practice and play the game(s) on the weekend.

The NLL's inaugural season was in 1987 and consisted of only four teams (Wikipedia, 2010a). Two common themes that have occurred in the NLL since its inaugural season are: franchise relocations and the folding of franchises. In fact, since the 2002 season, the NLL has struggled to keep a thirteen-team league, as it fluctuated from a ten-team league to a thirteen-team league over a seven year time period (Wikipedia, 2010a). According to Wikipedia (2010a), in 2003 the Montreal franchise suspended operations, becoming the second team in the league's history to be in existence for one season. The 2004 season saw two franchises fold and three franchises relocate, which left the NLL with ten teams. In 2005, the Vancouver Ravens folded. Moreover, the Montreal franchise rights were bought by the NHL's Minnesota Wild to create the Minnesota

Swarm (Wikipedia, 2010a). For the 2006 season the league consisted of eleven teams. The Anaheim Storm suspended operations, the Portland Lumberjacks were added as an expansion team and Bruce Urban purchased the rights to suspend the Ottawa franchise and form the Edmonton Rush. In 2007, the league expanded once again adding the New York Titans and the Chicago Shamrox allowing the NLL to have thirteen teams in the league. The 2008 season was originally supposed to be cancelled as the league and the players could not come to a collective bargaining agreement (Wikipedia, 2010a). However, an agreement was struck and the season was played but Arizona and Boston opted not to play that season due to business issues, yet they were expected to return in 2009. This left the NLL with 12 teams. In 2009, Boston joined the league as expected; however, Arizona as well as Chicago ceased operations, which still allowed the league to maintain 12 teams. For the 2010 season, the NLL dropped to a 10-team league. The New York Titans folded its franchise along with Portland. In addition, the San Jose Stealth relocated to Washington (Wikipedia, 2010a).

The many teams that have either relocated or ceased operations over the last seven years demonstrates the challenges the NLL has had as a league. Along with franchise relocation and the folding of franchises, the NLL has also had attendance issues. Many NLL franchises share venues with NHL as well as NBA teams and the average seating capacity for these venues is approximately 18,000 (Munsey & Suppes, 2010). In 2009, the NLL's average league attendance was 10,018 people per game, which is problematic because many NLL franchises cannot fill their venues. Due to the fact that the NLL cannot raise their attendance numbers, which contributes to franchise folding and relocation, the management of lacrosse is a relevant topic to address. In addition to

examining the business side of lacrosse, fan behaviour in lacrosse is another important topic for discussion, which will be addressed further in the next section.

Fan Behaviour in Lacrosse

One of the main reasons major sport leagues thrive is due to the loyalty of their fans or consumers. Prosperous major leagues have loyal fans consuming the sport product in many different ways (i.e., going to the games, watching games on television, and purchasing merchandise). According to Day (1969) and Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) as cited in Wakefield (1995), “in terms of consumer behaviour, loyalty typically implies a commitment to repeat purchases, based upon an ongoing positive evaluation or attitude toward the brand or service provider” (p. 341). In sport consumer behaviour Wakefield and Sloan (1995) mentioned that when fans are loyal it usually results in higher attendance at games. When examining the Edmonton Rush, the franchise does have a modest loyal fan base as its average attendance in 2009 was 8,347. However, the Rush’s attendance is considered quite low because the organization is filling less than half the seats at Rexall Place where the venue’s seating capacity is 17,100 (Munsey & Suppes, 2010). Moreover, the Rush’s 2009 average attendance can be considered low because the league’s average attendance is 10,018 (Pointstreak, 2010). As well, the Toronto Rock (top Canadian franchise in terms of attendance in 2009) has an average attendance of 13,921. Therefore, in order to be more successful the Rush needs to attract more fans to attend games.

The Rush’s poor attendance demonstrates that there is definitely a problem that needs to be addressed. Through the review of literature it has been made apparent that many sport marketing studies are based upon the team-fan bond using existing

fans/spectators as participants (i.e., Funk & Pastore, 2000; Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008). Although all of these authors have made important contributions to the sport marketing literature, very little research has concentrated on exploring why sport fans choose not to attend certain professional sport events. If the management of a professional sport team is able to recognize and understand the reasons why certain sport fans choose not to attend certain sport events, it can develop marketing strategies to attract these nonfans. This, in turn, could expand a league or team's fan base thus increasing attendance. In addition, it could lead a professional league to transform into a major league (i.e. a 'Big Four' sport). For the Rush, as well as the NLL, expanding its fan base along with increasing attendance is crucial, as the league has been struggling to fill the seats at many of its venues.

While the nonfan has been identified within the Frequency Escalator model by Mullin et al. (2007), minimal research has been conducted on nonfans or nonconsumers of sport. One study that did speak about nonfans was a study conducted by Russell and Goldstein (1995) who found value in using both nonfan as well as fan participants. However, the researchers needed a more detailed explanation regarding the nonfan participants. The study conducted by Russell and Goldstein (1995) will also be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter. As a result, gaining an understanding as to why sport fans decide not to attend Rush games can be very beneficial not only to the Rush and the league but also to other mid-level professional sport leagues and the sport marketing literature.

Qualitative Online Research

Over the years not only has the internet developed dramatically, but also has the knowledge and understanding of how to utilize the internet as a research tool (Folkman Curasi, 2001). Furthermore Folkman Curasi (2001) mentions that online research tools have great advantages in assisting with qualitative consumer behaviour research to better comprehend the consumers being studied. There have been a number of academic studies that have utilized the internet as a research gathering tool. Due to the versatility of the internet, online research gathering techniques can take many forms. For instance, Kozinets (1998, 2002) has conducted research using what he has termed netnography, which is a type of ethnography. Netnography is “an interpretive method devised specifically to investigate the consumer behaviour of cultures and communities present on the Internet” (Kozinets, 1998, p. 366).

Not only can researchers observe a virtual community, but they can also gather data online using either one-on-one interviews or a focus group. Moreover, these interviews or focus groups can be conducted asynchronously or synchronously using many different internet communication tools. For example, a study conducted by Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr, and Elford (2004) used chat rooms to conduct interviews with their subjects. Kitto and Barnett (2007) collected their data by completing interviews via e-mail. O'Connor and Madge (2003) had their subjects participate in focus groups using software that allowed the interviewer and interviewees to chat in groups. These are just a few examples of how researchers are using the internet to their benefit for qualitative data collection. There are many advantages to using the internet for qualitative data collection, such as low cost, convenience, and lack of geographic constraints (Davis et al., 2004;

Kenny, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). However, there are also some disadvantages to gathering qualitative research online. For instance, there may be minimal thick qualitative descriptions, lack of body language to aid understanding, and participants are able to self-edit and reflect (Davis et al., 2004; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kenny, 2004; Kitto & Barnett, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008).

While researchers are beginning to use the internet as a qualitative research gathering tool, one must understand that virtual gathering techniques are still quite new to the literature and are still in a developing stage. However, as society moves forward and becomes more technologically advanced, the internet and online data collection will potentially be used more frequently and efficiently. This is why exploring the internet as a qualitative research gathering tool is an important topic to consider. This technique may be valuable for sport marketers because there are so many online techniques that can be used to reach specific sport consumer target markets and there has been a shortage of sport marketing internet based qualitative research.

Working Model Definitions

The two models that will be used and referred to throughout this study will be the Frequency Escalator (FE; Mullin et al., 2007) and the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM; Funk & James, 2001); for further detail please refer to Appendices A and B. The FE consists of three different categories of consumption: the nonconsumer, the indirect consumer, and consumer(s). Each of these three categories can be subdivided further. Under the nonconsumer category there are the nonaware nonconsumer, the misinformed nonconsumer, as well as the aware nonconsumer. The indirect consumer category contains media consumers. Finally, in the consumer category there are the light users, the

medium users, and the heavy users (Mullin, et al., 2007).

According to Mullin et al. (2007), the four steps of sport marketing are to increase awareness, attract interest, arouse desire, and initiate action in hopes that it later results in a person consuming the product or service. The ultimate goal of sport marketers is to get people moving on and up the FE (Mullin et al., 2007). However, for the purpose of this study, the main focus of the FE will be on the nonconsumers category. As mentioned by Mullin et al. (2007), the more developed a professional sport franchise or league has become, the less of an influence new consumers have on attendance and/or participation figures. Mullin et al. (2007) have termed this the ‘new consumer’ myopia because the impact of new consumers is often short lived and can be very minimal to a sport organization. For example, some NFL franchises, like the Green Bay Packers (NFL, 2010), have a waiting list for fans interested in becoming season ticket holders. Servicing existing consumers should be the Green Bay Packers’ and alike franchises’ number one priority rather than trying to attract nonconsumers. Mullin et al. (2007) stated, “the ‘new-consumer’ myopia is perhaps acceptable for sport industry segments in which total demand is low, such as professional soccer, or some professional baseball markets, such as Montreal” (p. 269). This is why the focus of the Rush will be on the nonconsumers category as the demand for the Rush’s product is still relatively low.

The PCM model was developed by Funk and James (2001) and “specifies the general parameters in which a relationship between an individual, sport or athlete is mediated” (p. 121). The PCM has four levels that function along a vertical continuum. At the initial floor is awareness, then comes attraction, followed by attachment, and ending with allegiance. Awareness is when an individual knows a sport or team exists. Attraction

occurs when the individual acknowledges having a favourite team. Attachment takes place when a psychological connection begins to form. Lastly, in the allegiance stage, an individual has become a loyal fan of the sport or team. For this study, the focus will be more on the awareness stage. This is because the primary purpose of this study is to understand the nonfans of the Rush and it is highly unlikely that the nonfan participants are at any other stage of the model.

These two models have been chosen because of their similarities as well as their complementing attributes. However, as Funk and James (2001) pointed out, these two models also have some differences. According to Funk and James (2001), the FE model is very behaviourally driven, whereas the PCM focuses on the internal psychological process, which explains the different levels of psychological connection. Lastly, the FE presumes that people progress at the same behavioural pace once they are on the FE, whereas the PCM demonstrates that individuals, psychologically, move at different paces on the PCM (Funk & James, 2001). Although the two models do have differences, the PCM and the FE fit well for the purpose of this study.

Justification for the Study

In the sport marketing literature there are considerable gaps in knowledge when it comes to the management of professional lacrosse, nonfans, and online qualitative data collection. These are important topics to address as these areas could further enhance sport marketers' knowledge on both theoretical and practical fronts. For sport marketers, getting involved with the NLL and the management of lacrosse will allow them to learn new marketing tactics as well as tap into a market that has yet reached its full potential.

The NLL is considered a professional sport league. However it cannot be

considered a major league, like the ‘Big Four.’ In a study conducted by Greenwood, Kanter, and Casper (2006), the authors developed the idea of mid-level professional sport leagues. Mid-level professional sport leagues are those such as the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) or Major League Soccer (MLS) that “struggle to reach the level of fan support and public profile necessary to be deemed elite or high-level professional sport (i.e., NHL)” (p. 254). This explanation makes it evident that the NLL would be considered a mid-level professional sport and according to Greenwood et al. (2006), there is a definite need for research on fans of mid-level professional sport leagues. Two recent examples of the struggles facing mid-level sport leagues are the Arena Football League (AFL) as well as NFL Europa. In 2007 the NFL Europa ceased operations as did the AFL in 2009 (ESPN, 2009; NFL, 2010), due to the inability to attract consumers. However the AFL was able to bounce back and return for the 2010 season (AFL, 2010). The AFL and NFL Europa demonstrate the crisis’s that mid-level professional sport leagues face. The example of these two leagues further justifies this study because the NLL would be classified as a mid-level sport as the league most certainly struggles to gain popularity within the major league sport industry.

In addition to further developing sport marketers’ knowledge on the management of professional lacrosse, the literature on nonfans/nonconsumers in a sport marketing context is also lacking. This could be due to the fact that the more mature a sport organization is, the less of an influence new consumers have on attendance and participation (Mullin et al., 2007). In addition, most sport marketing research on professional sport is conducted with respect to mature leagues. However, as mentioned previously by Mullin et al. (2007), marketing to the new or nonconsumers for mid-level

professional sport franchises can be beneficial to the league to create some demand. Moreover, according to Funk, Mahony, and Ridinger (2002) as well as Koo and Hardin (2008), determining the dissimilarities between consumers' and nonconsumers' motives for attending or not attending a certain sport event is necessary in future research. These are reasons why sport marketers need to take advantage of this under-studied area of research, so mid-level professional sport leagues and their franchises, such as the NLL and Rush, can develop appropriate marketing strategies to attract nonfans.

Although there is minimal research in the sport management and marketing literature on nonfans/nonconsumers, there was an academic study outside of the sport management literature that addressed the nonconsumer. This study demonstrated that conducting research using both nonconsumers and consumers as participants can be beneficial, which will be of assistance for not only this study but also future nonconsumer studies as well. The study was conducted by Schyver and Smith (2005) on attitudes of consumers versus nonconsumers toward a tangible product. The researchers found that it was very advantageous to have both the consumers as well as the nonconsumers participate in the same focus group. As suggested by Schyver and Smith (2005), having the nonconsumers and consumers in the same focus group was valuable because it allowed each group to compare attitudes and beliefs about the product. This later allowed the researchers to identify the barriers the nonconsumers faced when trying to consume the product. Therefore, the study conducted by Schyver and Smith (2005) will be of assistance to this research project as it demonstrates that having both the consumer and nonconsumer in the same focus group can provide information that otherwise would not have been discovered if only one type of participant was present. By including the nonfan

and fan of the Rush into one focus group, it will assist with identifying the barriers that nonfans face in their decisions not to attend Rush games. Moreover, the discovery of these barriers will lead to the development of sport marketing techniques that will assist with converting the Rush's nonfans into fans.

The fact that the sport management and sport marketing literature has failed to embrace online qualitative data collection as a research methodology represents the final gap in knowledge. Due to the budgetary constraints of this research project, the researcher was unable to travel to Edmonton and collect data in person, which is one of the reasons why online qualitative research tools were being explored. Although the internet has been used in an array of creative ways to attract consumers and fans throughout the sport industry, sport management academics and practitioners have minimally utilized the internet as a qualitative data collection tool. One sport management study that did use the internet to collect qualitative data was conducted by Burton and Bruening (2003) who used online focus groups to study University of Connecticut sport fans. Burton and Bruening (2003) mentioned that there is a need for sport scholars to consider the utilization of online groups to further their research, yet seven years later no one has heeded the call. According to Delpy and Bosetti (1998) as cited in Hur, Ko, Valachich (2007) "the Internet is becoming one of the most important marketing tools for sport managers and marketers, because it has become a primary source of information for sport consumers" (p. 521). Although practitioners within the sport industry are using the internet for marketing purposes, academics and practitioners in sport have yet to explore the many possibilities online qualitative data collection has to offer.

One example of how the internet is being used in sport is through online sport communities. For instance, MLS followers in the United States have built virtual communities so they are able to connect with other MLS fans world wide (Wilson, 2007). These virtual communities allow marketers to get an understanding of the wants and needs of their target markets through mere observation. Another example of how the internet is being utilized in sport is through online fantasy sport. Online fantasy sport has also gained momentum and sport managers are jumping on the bandwagon to develop fantasy leagues so that fans can connect with leagues even when they are away from the stadium or arena (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007). Although the internet has gained popularity within the sport management field, the use of the internet for qualitative data collection has been lacking with not only sport academics but also sport practitioners. This study has contributed to bridging this gap in knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

For this research study, the Edmonton Rush of the NLL have been chosen as the franchise to examine. The reason for this is because when looking at the attendance of all three Canadian teams for the 2009 season, the Rush had the worst attendance figures for the Canadian franchises. Moreover the Rush were chosen because the organization shares a venue (Rexall Place) with the Edmonton Oilers of the NHL as well as the Oil Kings of the Western Hockey League (WHL). According to Mullin et al. (2007), when developing a marketing plan, sport marketers must first segment the marketplace (i.e., through demographics, geomarket information, psychographics, product usage rates or product benefits). Once the marketplace has been segmented, the sport marketer is then able to identify its target market (Mullin et al., 2007). In the case of this research, the target

market is nonfans of the Rush who are fans of the Oilers and/or Oil Kings, which may be considered the most likely group of nonfans to become Rush fans. This is due to the fact that nonfans can range from those who hate sports to those who love sports, which is why sport fans who are not fans of the Rush are a logical target market. For instance in a study conducted by Russell and Goldstein (1995), the researchers used nonfan participants who had no interest in the sport being studied (football) or any sport for that matter. If the fan and nonfan participants do not even have a common interest like sport it may make comparing fans and nonfans more challenging due to the differences of interest between the subjects.

Furthermore, fans of the Rush, along with the Oilers and Oil Kings, were selected because of the similarities the sport of lacrosse has with hockey. Therefore, it is logical to choose not only sport fans but also fans of hockey, instead of fans of football or baseball, for example. The literature also suggests that the nonfans who are most likely to become fans could be those that spectate other sports in the same venue because these nonfans are already willing to attend other sport events at the same venue (Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995). As a result, venue specific factors (i.e., stadium location, parking, cleanliness, and amenities) that have an affect on a persons' decision not to attend a sport event are not an issue if these fans are willing to attend the venue for another sport event. Therefore, this study turned to the fans of the professional Oilers and fans of the amateur Oil Kings, who already attend games at the Rush's arena. For all these reasons, the nonfan participants of this study were those who attend Oilers' and/or Oil Kings' games. In order to get the best data possible, fans of the Rush were also participants.

An online focus group was chosen as the main method to collect data. The online focus group was chosen for two reasons. The first is due geographic constraints. The researcher did not have the necessary funds to fly to Edmonton and conduct face-to-face focus groups with the nonfans and fans of the Edmonton Rush. The second reason for conducting an online focus group was to contribute to the need for research using online data collection techniques in the sport management field. According to Burton and Bruening (2003), more use of online focus groups is needed when conducting research on sport. Moreover, “combining technology and method is the present as well as the future of academia” (Burton & Bruening, 2003, p. 326).

The participants of this study were recruited through the following online forums: facebook.com, edmontonrush.com/forum/, fans.oilers.nhl.com/directory, whlfans.ca/. The researcher visited these online forums twelve days prior to the actual start of the data collection period to see which participants were the most engaged with the online forums. The researcher created a discussion within each online forum to briefly explain the study and ask people if they would like to be involved. Those who said yes to getting involved with the study were directed to a closed research website and forum developed specifically for this research project. This website allowed participants to have their own username and password so they could enter the closed forum where the online focus group was held.

Before the focus group commenced, each participant was asked to read an informed consent form as well as fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. Once all the participants consented and the questionnaires were complete, the focus group commenced on February 8, 2010 and was open for discussion for four weeks. This

ensured that all participants started the focus group on the same day and ended on the same day. As this research was being conducted through the interpretivist lens, the researcher made sure that open-ended questions were prepared so participants could create valuable discussion throughout the four weeks. The online discussion was so important to this research project because of its interpretive nature. The researcher believes that the communal world is an evolving social process, which is shaped by those people involved (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Furthermore, the researcher wanted to understand the experiences of the participants involved through their subjective realities (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), which is why the construction of the questions was so important. The researcher did use all the questions that were developed and probing questions were required, which were posted to the group as a whole. The researcher was not only there to post questions but also to ensure the discussion did not get too off topic. In addition to a focus group and the questionnaire, a one-on-one telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions as well as a document analysis of the Edmonton Rush's marketing efforts within the Edmonton region was also conducted in order to get a sense of how the organization is attempting to reach sport fans in the community.

Therefore, through an interpretivist lens, the primary purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the Edmonton Rush nonfans, while the secondary purpose was to understand Edmonton Rush fans. More specifically, this study first wanted to understand why fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings decide not to attend Rush games followed by a secondary understanding of the reasons why fans do attend Rush games. Through these findings the researcher will provide insight that will be of interest

to the Rush, other NLL teams, as well as other mid-level sport leagues or teams.

Furthermore the researcher believes that the findings from this study have led to suggested marketing implications that the Rush can implement to attract nonfans. The primary and secondary research questions that will be answered are:

1. Why do fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings choose not to attend Edmonton Rush games?
2. Why do fans of the Edmonton Rush attend games?

Definitions of Terms

The terms used in this study will be defined as follows:

Fan: For the purpose of this study the definition of a fan will be consistent with the PCM. A fan in this study is either at the attachment or allegiance stage (Funk & James, 2001). The fan has begun a psychological connection towards a sport team or has become quite committed to that specific sport team and at both stages the fan is rooting for that team to win (Funk & James, 2001).

Spectator: This study will define a spectator more generically. A spectator in this research project is a person who watches sport games live at the venue.

Sport Consumer: A sport consumer is someone who purchases sport products or sport services for their own personal use or enjoyment. As stated by Mullin et al (2007) sport marketers direct their energy to meet the needs and wants of sport consumers.

Nonfan/nonconsumer: These two terms will be interchangeably used. For the purpose of this study the nonfan/nonconsumer will be defined as someone who is either aware of the sport product and chooses not to attend or is aware of the sport product and consequently does not attend because they are misinformed (Mullin et al., 2007). It

should be noted that within the nonconsumer category on the FE there is a nonaware nonconsumer group. However, the fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings are not only all sport fans, but also spectate in the same building the Rush use. Therefore, the participants of this study are aware that the Rush exists, making the nonaware nonconsumer group irrelevant to this study.

To further explain these definitions for the purpose of this research project, the researcher was examining fans of the Rush and fans of the Oilers/Oil Kings who spectate by attending their team's games live at Rexall Place. The Oilers' and Oil Kings' fans however, do not attend Rush games. In addition, because there is no real alternative consuming option (unlike major league teams who have television contracts, there is no alternative way to consume NLL games outside of live attendance), the fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings who participated in this study are nonfans of the Rush. All participants of this study were indeed fans of their respective teams because they attend the games as well as they take the time to post comments on team-based fan websites. This is not something a person would do if they did not care about the fortunes of the team. Therefore, these terms were employed consistently throughout this research project.

Limitations

Limitations are "shortcomings, conditions or influences that cannot be controlled by the researcher" (Soicher, 2010, ¶. 1). Any limitations that might influence the results of a study should be mentioned. The following limitations were acknowledged in this study:

1. The dynamics of online focus group research are less robust than face-to-face focus group research.
2. The investigator was a novice online researcher.

3. Due to geographic and financial constraints the focus group was conducted over the internet.
4. The online focus group did not have an even number of males and females which could have affected the dynamics of the discussion.
5. The Rush had their best season in franchise history and the Oilers and Oil Kings were close to having their worst, as such the data may reflect a set of factors specific to the context of the 2009-2010 seasons.
6. The access to information and resources regarding the NLL and Edmonton Rush was limited which forced the researcher to rely on the internet as the main source of collecting information and resources.
7. The participants were never introduced face-to-face to the researcher and this could have led to misunderstandings or the subjects questioning the credibility of the study.
8. Five out of ten participants were male aged 19-34, which could have skewed the results to this particular demographic.

Delimitations

The delimitations of a study “are those characteristics that limit the scope (define the boundaries) of the inquiry as determined by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions that were made throughout the development of the proposal” (Soicher, 2010, ¶.

5). The following delimitations were acknowledged in this study:

1. The researcher selected only participants who had access to the internet as well as a computer.
2. The researcher chose to conduct the research in the month of February of 2010

which happened to coincide with the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics and Super Bowl XLIV.

3. The researcher chose to use the Edmonton Rush because this organization had the lowest attendance figures compared to the other Canadian franchises.
4. The researcher decided not to observe and participate in the online forums prior to recruitment.
5. The researcher chose to not conduct the online focus group in real time.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Nonfans

A review of the literature reveals multiple definitions for a sport fan, which makes defining a nonfan even more difficult. Trail, Robinson, Dick, and Gillentine (2003) question if the terms fan and spectator should be used synonymously. This point has been raised due to the many definitions for both terms but also because spectator has been used over fan and vice versa (Trail et al., 2003). Fink, Trail, and Anderson (2002b) have used the term spectator to describe sport consumption behaviour, but the same authors of a different study (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002a) used the term fan to describe sport consumption behaviour. The authors of these two studies have used fan over spectator and vice versa and this is one example of why it is so difficult to develop definitions for these terms.

Not only is the term fan difficult to define, but differentiating between fan and spectator has also become challenging. According to Pooley (1978) as cited in Funk and James (2001), the fan/spectator concept is like a continuum, where spectators are at one end and fans at the other. This is similar to Trail et al. (2003) who suggested that fans and spectators are two dissimilar words and when researchers are studying either of the two, researchers should use Sloan's (1989) terminology. Sloan (1989) describes the difference in characteristics between the two terms by stating that a fan is someone who has extreme passion and devotion of a given leisure activity, while a spectator just simply watches and observes with no type of attachment. These two separate definitions are consistent with a study conducted by Koo and Hardin (2008) where fans demonstrated higher values of emotional attachment towards the team than those who were spectators.

Another reason why there is much confusion is due to some researchers segmenting the term fan into a hierarchy of sub-categories. For instance, Smith (1988) described the serious fan as someone who has a strong identification with a team or player whereas a normal sports fan does not. Moreover, Wann and Branscombe (1990) stated that there is a die-hard fan and then a fair-weather fan. The die-hard fan will continuously stand by a team, while a fair-weather fan jumps on the bandwagon when the team is showing success (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Sutton, McDonald, Milne, Cimperman (1997) suggested that there are three levels of fans: low identification (social fans), medium identification (focused fans), and high identification (vested fans). With the social fan there is definitely a relationship that exists, however it is low in financial commitment, emotion, and involvement (Sutton et al., 1997). The focused fan is associated with a sport or team but only through some attributes or elements that are attractive (Sutton et al., 1997). Finally, the vested fan has the most loyal and longest-term relationship a fan can possibly have with a sport or team (Sutton et al., 1997). It is important to understand the terms fan and spectator from many different perspectives. However, because academics have defined the terms in many ways, it is necessary for this research project to be consistent. Therefore, for the purpose of this study the researcher has ensured the fan and spectator definitions remain consistent with the definitions mentioned in the introduction.

When understanding the terminology being used for this study some issues must be addressed. First, the literature review conducted on fans and spectators does have some relevance but at times is not applicable to this research project because the studies discussed have either been college sport or major league sport, which have different

dynamics than the NLL. For instance, college sport is different than professional sport because students and alumni have a built-in strong identification to the team due to the the school it represents. Professional sport teams do not necessarily have that overlap in identification. Moreover, the NLL has different dynamics to major league sport because the majority of major league teams do not have to attract new fans due to the existing strong fan base, as mentioned by Mullin et al. (2007). However, it should be noted that there are some major league teams that do struggle with attracting fans. For example, in MLB, the Montreal Expos did not have a strong fan base which forced the team to relocate to Washington (Mullin et al., 2007). In contrast to major league teams, the majority of NLL teams are challenged to attract fans because the NLL is a struggling mid-level professional league. The main purpose of this research project is to study fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings who attend hockey games at Rexall Place but choose not to attend Rush games. The secondary purpose is to examine fans of the Rush who attend Rush games. This is important to note as a fan of a major league team can be a fan without physically attending a game. For example, there are some NFL fans who have never attended a game but religiously watch their team every Sunday and follow that team any way possible. Therefore the participants of this study will be fans who also attend games.

The literature review thus far has addressed the fan and spectator, which is important throughout this research process. However, as part of this study's main purpose, nonfans of the Rush are closely examined. With this in mind, defining a nonfan is imperative. Although Mullin et al. (2007) addressed the nonconsumer, there is a major gap in the knowledge about the nonfan. Only one article was found within the sport

management literature addressed the nonfan. Russell and Goldstein (1995) identify the personality differences between fans and nonfans of European soccer. The nonfan participants were men who had no interest in football and sport in general, which may have made it difficult to compare the two groups, as they would have many dissimilar interests. Whereas for this study, the nonfans are hockey fans, specifically Edmonton Oilers and Oil Kings fans, which will be compared to fans of the Edmonton Rush, where commonalities may be recognized (i.e., sport fans). Although Russell and Goldstein (1995) mentioned that the nonfans used were not sport fans, they did not give a clear definition as to what classified someone to be a nonfan, which could have been an important component to their research. Yet Russell and Goldstein (1995) did find that selecting a nonfan group is essential to providing a valid comparison. Furthermore, Funk et al. (2002,) along with Koo and Hardin (2008), suggested that discovering the differences between fans' and nonfans' motives for attending or not attending a certain sport event is needed in future research.

Outside of the sport management literature there have been two researchers that addressed nonconsumers. Schyver and Smith (2005) used consumers and nonconsumers of a food based product to compare the attitudes and beliefs surrounding the consumption of a specific perishable food. These authors found it beneficial to include the two different types of consumers in their focus groups because each type of consumer was able to generate discussion between each other. Furthermore, they found that there were duplicate themes that arose from both consumer groups, yet there were differences in attitudes about these themes which was essential and possibly determined if a nonconsumer was going to consume the perishable food (Schyver & Smith, 2005).

Although this study will assist this research project, it must be noted that in a sport context the idea of consumer versus nonconsumer is less clear cut than with food based products. For instance, someone who eats a certain food is a consumer, someone who chooses not to eat a certain food is a nonconsumer of that food. It's not that simple with sport, which has been demonstrated through this literature review.

In order to reach a definition of a nonfan, the FE along with the PCM must be discussed in more detail. Mullin et al. (2007) mentioned that there are three types of nonconsumers: the nonaware nonconsumer, the misinformed nonconsumer, and the aware nonconsumer. The nonaware nonconsumer is a person who has no idea of the existence of the sport product so therefore does not attend (Mullin et al., 2007). For the misinformed nonconsumer, Mullin et al. (2007) stated that "the misinformation usually relates to the cost of attending, the availability of tickets, or safety concerns" (p. 270). Lastly, the aware nonconsumer is a person who is aware of the sport product who decides not to attend. The reason for this is because "the product does not offer the benefits this person is looking for, or this person has no need for this type of product" (p. 270). This research project has only encountered the aware nonconsumer and the misinformed nonconsumer as the participants of this study are fans of the Oilers and/or Oil Kings who have attended Oilers and Oil Kings games at Rexall Place, which is where the Rush also play. Due to the fact that the nonconsumer and misinformed nonconsumer are aware of the Rush, the first stage of the PCM fits well with the FE. According to Funk and James (2001), the "process of forming a psychological connection to a sport or team begins with the notion of awareness" (p. 125). Therefore, it is assumed that a majority of Oilers and Oil Kings fans are aware or misinformed nonconsumers who consequently choose not to attend

Rush games.

Venue Constraints

A discussion of venue constraints is important because venue-based factors are a part of the rationale for using fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings as they eagerly attend Rexall Place for hockey. This means that venue-based factors would most likely not be given as reasons for the fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings to not attend Rush games in the same arena. Therefore, this further supports the reason why the Rush were chosen along with the Oilers and Oil Kings as a theoretical sample.

It has been revealed through the literature that one of the major reasons people decide not to attend a sport event or game is due to the constraints caused by the particular venue. In the 1990s, many venues were either being built, renovated or under construction in order to ensure a design that would improve customer comfort and boost customer services (Greenwell, Fink & Pastore, 2002). According to Greenwell et al. (2002), when a team is financially struggling due to poor attendance, it is often blamed on the poor design or construction of the facility. In addition, Ferreira and Armstrong (2004) mentioned that the venue in which the sport event is being held may be the most prominent characteristic when consumers are determining whether to attend the sport event within that venue.

Trail, Robinson, and Kim (2008) defined structural constraints as being those “that are not inter- or intrapersonal constraints, that are typically environmentally and situationally based and include substitutes or alternatives to a specified leisure activity” (p. 191). Some examples of venue constraints include: concessions, restrooms, seating, cleanliness of venue, professionalism of staff, crowding, fan control and parking (Trail, et

al., 2008; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995). Recent trends indicate “that the physical environment has an influence on customers’ attitudes and behaviours beyond their perceptions of the core product” (Greenwell et al., 2002, p. 130). One major finding that Greenwell et al. (2002) discovered was that the core product, the physical facility and the service personnel explained the variance in customer satisfaction when the three were all interrelated. However, when considered individually, very little of the variance was unique to the physical facility or to service personnel. This is consistent with Mullin et al. (2007) who mentioned that the concept of product and place are reactive to each other because a consumer will assess one based on the perception of the other. Wakefield and Sloan (1995) stated that attendance is not just a function of the core product or team loyalty but it is the entire experience spectators have at a facility.

In addition, Ferreira and Armstrong (2004) state that when teams share a facility it is probable that the consumers have similar opinions about the facility and service, yet the core product could influence them when deciding to attend a game in the same venue. This is extremely relevant to the current study as the participants of this study attend Oilers and Oil Kings games but do not attend Rush games, which suggests the venue is most likely not the problem. Therefore, other non-venue factors are almost certainly the reasons why fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings do not attend Rush games. According to Trail et al (2008), non-venue factors that may deter people from attending a sport event could be other sport entertainment, leisure activities, social commitments, work/school commitments or lack of team success. Through this research study, some of the reasons mentioned above emerged as to why Oilers and Oil Kings fans do not attend, but many more different explanations also emerged as to why they do not attend, through the

inductive interpretive methodology of this study.

The Fan Connection

This section of the literature review will examine motives and factors that make fans even more loyal, identified or attached. This is important to understand because the Rush and perhaps other struggling NLL franchises or mid-level professional sport teams need to be able to attract nonfans and develop a level of attachment to turn the nonfans into fans and move them up the FE or PCM. This is necessary because as fans move up the FE or PCM they will be more inclined to attend more games and in turn generate more revenue for the franchise. Furthermore, some of these factors and motives that influence attendance and loyalty are found in the analysis of the data. However, one must also keep in mind that with an interpretive approach some factors and motives that have yet to be discovered, inductively emerged in this research study.

As mentioned in the introduction, when it comes to reviewing the literature to explain the connection fans and spectators have with a team or sport it becomes an exercise of determining if there is an appropriate term to use or whether or not it is just semantic differences (Funk & James, 2001). As stated by Funk and James (2001), the terms that have been used are: identification, attraction, association, attachment, involvement, importance, commitment, and loyalty. For instance, Bowlby (1979), as cited in Koo and Hardin (2008), defines attachment as “an emotional bond between a person and a specific object and stronger attachments are linked to a stronger mind-set of association, affection, or obsession to a specific object” (p. 31). Koo and Hardin (2008) point out that in a sport context this is consistent with Trail et al.’s (2000) definition of identification, “An orientation of the self in regard to other objects, including a person or

group, that results in feelings or sentiments of close attachment” (p. 31). Furthermore, motivation can also be considered one of the related terms, however it is often connected with identification. Motives are claimed to fulfil social and/or psychological needs and can include: vicarious achievement, aesthetics, social interaction, eustress, escape, and so on (Trail et al., 2003). Whereas things a person can identify with are: player, community, team, and coach (Trail et al., 2003). For instance, in a study conducted by Greenwood et al. (2006) on sport fan team identification for mid-level professional sport, the researchers found that the players and/or coaches variable was the strongest predictor of sport fan team identification followed by being native or a resident in the area.

Sutton et al. (1997) developed a conceptual framework of fan identification that includes levels, motivations, and benefits of fan identification (see Appendix C). This model suggests that managerial factors influence fan identification, which result in managerial benefits (Sutton et al., 1997). This framework is considered a closed system “where the managerial factors are influenced by the feedback loops from fan identification and managerial benefits” (Sutton et al., 1997, p. 16). Through this model Sutton et al. (1997) were able to develop implications that can be controlled by sport managers and marketers and are similar to the findings of other researchers mentioned in this section. The suggestions were as follows: increase team/player accessibility to the public, increase community involvement activities, reinforce the team’s history and tradition, and create opportunities for group affiliation and participation.

Other researchers have taken different approaches in order to understand the connections fans and spectators have with a sport team or event. For instance, Funk et al. (2004) conducted a study on understanding the relationship between consumer motives

and involvement with a professional sport team in the WNBA. In this study, the researchers introduced the Team Sport Involvement Model (TSI). Funk et al. (2004) found that a wholesome exciting environment, social interaction, identifying players as role models, and vicariously experiencing game outcomes were the most noteworthy attributes of the study (Funk et al., 2004).

Similar to Funk et al. (2004), Wann et al. (2008) wanted to examine the motivational profiles of sport fans of different sports. Some of the findings these authors discovered were that those attracted to individual sports (i.e., non-team sports such as tennis or figure skating) were more likely motivated by aesthetics whereas self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, and family motivation were the major motivators for those attending team sports (Wann et al, 2008). Furthermore, aesthetic motivation was more relevant among those who chose to be a fan of nonaggressive sport, while those who are fans of aggressive sport are motivated by economic concerns, eustress, group affiliation, and entertainment. Lastly, the researchers found that aesthetic motivation was the number one motivation for stylistic sport and had the highest mean score for any motive of any sport (Wann et al, 2008).

In a study carried out by Trail et al. (2003) they found that motives could be placed into three separate categories. The first category would be motives that apply to fans of successful teams (e.g., achievement). The second category would be motives that apply to spectators or fans of unsuccessful teams (e.g., aesthetics, physical skill of the athletes, eustress/drama, and knowledge). The last category includes the motives that apply to both spectator and fan (e.g., escape and social interaction). In addition, the researchers discovered that the three types of motives relate dissimilarly with different

points of attachment (i.e., vicarious achievement was related to identification with the team, coach, and community). In comparison, Funk and Pastore (2000) used attitudinal measures (i.e., behaviour, commitment, importance, and direct experience) to also understand where a fan sits in terms of loyalty (i.e., nonloyalty, moderate loyalty, and high loyalty). Funk and Pastore (2000) found that attitude measures of importance and direct experience could possibly be the most effective predictors of loyalty toward a professional sport team.

For this study, understanding the motives/factors that influence fan loyalty/attendance assisted with the data analysis when trying to discover emerging themes. Moreover these factors/motives further enhance a fan's loyalty/attachment/identity, which will benefit a sport franchise financially.

The Management of Lacrosse

As mentioned in the introduction, the management of lacrosse has been extremely overlooked within the sport management literature or even any literature for that matter. However, the search of the literature did allow the researcher to come across a book titled: *Loyalty, Intensity, and Passion: An inside look at the National Lacrosse League* by Debbie Ellickson (2007). Yet, for anyone who is fairly knowledgeable about the game, this book did not present anything new. Moreover, this book was self-published and did not give a complete inside look of the NLL. The majority of the book focused only on one particular league franchise: the Calgary Roughnecks. Overall, this literature was not useful to this research project and may only be used to provide some facts about the league.

Other than the contributions by Ellickson (2007), little in the literature addresses

the NLL as a sport business. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, there is a major gap in the literature on the sport of lacrosse as a whole. As indicated above, the research that has covered lacrosse has specifically focused on the history of lacrosse (e.g., Poulter, 2003) or has appeared in medical journals (i.e. Dick et al., 2007). The NLL, as well as lacrosse, is a great topic for sport marketing researchers to address because the NLL is continuously trying to establish itself in the extremely competitive professional sport market, yet has not managed to do so for the last twenty-three years.

Even though the NLL was not the main focus in Greenwood et al. (2006), the researchers conducted a study that concentrated on mid-level professional sport (i.e., the WNBA and MLS). These leagues are considered mid-level professional sport because these leagues have potential to grow and become a major league sport (Greenwood et al., 2006). The NLL meets the characteristics of a mid-level professional sport because, while the league does have a unique product that attracts a fan base, the NLL's fan base is not large enough to compete with major league sports, yet the fan base does have potential to grow. According to Mullin et al. (2007), as discussed earlier, because the demand for the NLL is still in its developing stages, focusing on attracting nonconsumers can be very beneficial to not only the league, but also the literature. In addition, very little sport management literature has examined mid-level professional sport leagues and recently, as discussed in the introduction, two mid-level leagues (AFL and NFL Europa) have struggled to continue operations or have ceased operations. Therefore, learning how to help these mid-level sport leagues should be an area of concern. Moreover, sport marketers can gain expertise from this gap in the knowledge as studying the nonfans of a mid-level professional sport franchise is an untapped market. This could lead sport

marketers down a new path of contemporary marketing strategies. Thus, although the management of the NLL and the sport of lacrosse in general has been overlooked, it possesses considerable potential for research.

The Internet and Research

One limitation to this research included budgetary constraints. Due to a lack of funding, the researcher was unable to travel to Edmonton and conduct focus groups in person. Therefore, the researcher was constrained to examine qualitative online research tools, which will be examined throughout this section. Over the last ten years, the internet has experienced extraordinary growth as an international communication and exchange medium (Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Nill, 2007). Due to this, the internet is very appealing as a research tool because online data collection methods have the ability to increase accessibility to those markets that are typically unreachable (Folkman Curasi, 2001). As mentioned earlier, Kozinets (1998) has been using virtual communities to conduct netnographies because it is a great new qualitative method to observe the consumer behaviour of cultures and communities. The reason netnography has become such a desirable tool for qualitative research is due to consumers using newsgroups, chat rooms, personal web pages, and other online systems to exchange ideas, establish communities, and interact with other consumers who have their own personal opinions (Kozinets, 2002). It is important to understand the different ways one can use the internet as a qualitative tool, which is why the concept of netnography has been introduced. However for the purpose of this research other qualitative internet research tools will be examined.

In qualitative research, interviews are popular. Yet most interviews are conducted face-to-face which involves a “bodily presence with access to non-linguistic information

expressed in gestures and facial expressions” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 148). As the internet becomes more popular, researchers have begun to take the opportunity to conduct interviews online. Before exploring the literature for online research tools, it must be noted that similar to traditional face-to-face interviews and focus groups, there are many positives and negatives associated with online research tools, which will be examined in more detail to follow.

According to Folkman Curasi (2001) interviews conducted over the internet can be very beneficial to interpretive researchers. Folkman Curasi (2001) conducted a study in order to understand the differences and similarities between the data collected from face-to-face semi-structured interviews compared to interviews conducted online. Folkman Curasi (2001) conducted the online interviews via e-mail, which was similar to Kitto and Barnett (2007) who used e-mail for their online interviews. However, other researchers have used or suggested different online interview techniques such as: private chat rooms (Davis et al., 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) and instant messenger (Stieger & Reips, 2008). Folkman Curasi (2001) found that most of the online interviews lacked rich and thick description. Davis et al. (2004) discovered the same finding when they completed online interviews with participants who had HIV. Kitto and Barnett (2007) also had thin data from their e-mail interviews. However, online interviews that involved strongly motivated participants were able to provide the depth and detail similar to a face-to-face interview (Folkman Curasi, 2001). Moreover, the researcher discovered that if probing questions are utilized, it provided just as much detail as a face-to-face interview (Folkman Curasi, 2001). Yet, Davis et al. (2004) mentioned that in their study, which used online chat rooms, follow-up probing can inhibit the flow of the dialogue.

Folkman Curasi (2001), Kitto and Barnett (2007), as well as Burton and Bruening (2003) also found that online interviewees were able to read over their responses and make revisions before sending their answers. This means that computer-mediated interviews could be more thought out, yet there is less spontaneity in comparison to face-to-face interviews (Folkman Curasi, 2001). Moreover, according to Kitto and Barnett (2007), online interview data can be more accurate because there is no loss or inaccuracy in transcription. Lastly, because the participants are extremely important to not only face-to-face interviews, but also specifically to online interviews, it is important that the researcher recruits the best subjects possible in order to get the detail required for the research being conducted (Folkman Curasi, 2001; O'Connor & Madge, 2003).

Davis et al. (2004) used chat rooms to conduct their online interviews. The researchers found that online interviewing via chat rooms has its own distinctive practices and features that can lead to ambiguity (Davis et al., 2004). The ambiguity caused by interviewing online through chat rooms can arise in the form of word play. For instance, sarcasm and metaphor may not work well while online (Davis et al., 2004). Furthermore, especially for interviews taking place in chat rooms or via instant messaging, the interviewer must be familiar with emoticons and online short forms (i.e., ☺ is a smile face and str8 means straight) (Davis et al., 2004; O'Connor & Madge, 2003). Additionally Davis et al. (2004) stated that synchronous online interviews can be slow and the social and conversational cues of a face-to-face interview are missing. However, these researchers do mention that the limitations of the chat room interview may be overcome by conducting asynchronous online interviews (i.e., using e-mail) because there is more time for reflection and explanation.

In difference to the studies discussed above, Stieger and Reips (2008) used instant messenger (i.e., ICQ) interviewing for quantitative purposes versus qualitative purposes like the previous studies mentioned. The researchers used the Dynamic Interviewing Program (DIP) which is an interview agent specifically designed for ICQ instant messenger (Stieger & Reips, 2008). The DIP program allows for several interviews to be conducted at once. However, the researchers found that the response rate of DIP is not as high as online questionnaires (Stieger & Reips, 2008). According to Stieger and Reips (2008), ICQ and DIP were able to contact people cross culturally and the address book included with ICQ allowed for general demographic information to be collected. Yet if open-ended questions were used, DIP could not identify if the answer was really the answer or just a comment made. Overall, the researchers found that the problems they encountered through conducting interviews via the internet were due to the DIP and not the instant messenger program, ICQ (Stieger & Reips, 2008).

Not only can the internet be useful for conducting online interviews, but researchers have also been using the internet to conduct online focus groups. O'Connor and Madge (2003) carried out focus groups over the internet using a conference software package entitled Hotline Connect. This software enabled their participants to chat either in groups, one-to-one, or to others logged on at the same time (O'Connor & Madge, 2003). The researchers found that the conversation within the focus group flowed naturally, which is dissimilar to the findings of Davis et al. (2004). O'Connor and Madge (2003) stated that focus groups performed over the internet are very different from traditional focus groups and require the interviewer to develop different sets of skills. On the whole, O'Connor and Madge (2003) found online focus groups to be very

advantageous; however, like other researchers using the internet as a research tool, they understand that there still will be issues and problems that arise, just like conventional research methods.

Similar to O'Connor and Madge (2003), Kenny (2004) used a course management tool named WebCT to conduct the focus groups for her research. According to Kenny (2004) WebCT is "a program that facilitates the creation of web-based learning environments, to conduct an online, interactive focus group" (p. 416). The major advantage of WebCT as well as Hotline Connect was that only participants of the study could be included in the focus group as they were required to have a password to access the site (Kenny, 2004; O'Connor & Madge, 2003). One major difference between the two studies is that WebCT allowed participants to post responses anytime over an eight-week period in Kenny's (2004) study, whereas in the study conducted by O'Connor and Madge (2003), all the participants were in conversation at the same time. Therefore, when deciding on how to conduct an online focus group, the researcher had several options.

Due to the fact that the participants of the Kenny (2004) study could participate at anytime from anywhere, an environment was created that was comfortable and accessible as the subjects did not have to be on a specific meeting schedule. Increased comfort level was also something Burton and Bruening (2003) discovered when examining online focus groups. Kenny (2004) further found that because the subjects could participate whenever they wished over the eight-week period, group dynamics and interaction flourished and multi-threaded discussion emerged. This is contradictory to Folkman Curasi (2001) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) who stated that online group dynamics may not be as strong through internet usage. Kenny (2004) also discovered that she had

no one drop out of the focus group even over the eight-week period. That is everyone who started in the focus group was still participating at the end. Furthermore, because of the nature of an online focus group, Kenny (2004) easily facilitated 38 participants, where traditionally, focus groups have a much smaller number of six to ten participants (Morgan, 1997 as cited in Glesne, 2006). The sample size from Kenny (2004) conflicts with the suggested sample size from Burton and Bruening (2003), who suggests that the researcher should recruit about fifteen participants but expect ten participants to participate.

Unlike Davis et al. (2004), Folkman Curasi (2001), Kitto and Barnett (2007), as well as Kenny (2004) found that the online focus group was able to provide rich, detailed, and thick responses. As mentioned by almost all researchers in this section, Kenny (2004) found that while online focus groups or any type of online tool may have its advantages, there are times when online tools may not be appropriate for a study. For instance, in a study conducted by Madriz (1999) as cited in Kenny (2004), face-to-face interviews were a better option as the participants were socially marginalized and the face-to-face group interaction created a comfortable and natural environment. However, Kenny (2004) discovered that her experience was a positive one and encourages other researchers to explore this type of online tool.

Overall, all the researchers mentioned above have pointed out some critical opportunities and challenges of using the internet as a research tool (please refer to Appendix D). Some of the opportunities include: low cost (Davis et al., 2004; Folkman Curasi, 2001; O'Connor & Madge, 2003), can be a pre-test for traditional focus groups (Folkman Curasi, 2001), not as time consuming, no transcribing (Burton & Bruening,

2003; Davis et al., 2004; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kenny, 2004; Kitto & Barnett, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; O'Connor & Madge, 2003), limitless geographically (Burton & Bruening, 2003; Davis et al., 2004; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kitto & Barnett, 2007; O'Connor & Madge, 2003), great for member checking (Folkman Curasi, 2001), easily triangulated with additional data collected online to strengthen trustworthiness (Folkman Curasi, 2001), and ensures anonymity (Burton & Bruening, 2003; Kenny, 2004). The challenges of online research tools are as follows: non-verbal cues are missed (Burton & Bruening, 2003; Davis et al., 2004; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kitto & Barnett, 2007; O'Connor & Madge, 2003), online group dynamics not as strong, one word answers (Burton & Bruening, 2003; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kvale & Brinkman, 2008), interviewer has less control over the success of the interview (Folkman Curasi, 2001), difficult to develop rapport (Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; O'Connor & Madge, 2003), and unknown distractions to the interviewer may result in the interviewee not being fully engaged with the interview (O'Connor & Madge, 2003).

The research mentioned above has provided in-depth insight into the advantages and disadvantages of the different types of online research tools. However, only one of the discussed articles related to the sport management literature (i.e., Burton & Bruening, 2003). Although researchers and practitioners are using the internet, sport management researchers have yet to fully utilize the internet as a qualitative research tool (Burton and Bruening, 2003). As mentioned in the introduction, ways that the sport industry is using the internet to reach consumers is through fantasy sport (a fantasy league that is made up of participants who compete against each other based on statistics from real-life competition) (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007) and online chat rooms or forums. For instance,

BigSoccer.com has threads that deal with field-of-play topics along with business and cultural issues (Wilson, 2007). However, there are some sport researchers that are using Kozinets' (1998, 2002) netnography method. For example, Fuller, Jawecki, and Muhlbacher (2007) observed innovation activities of online consumer communities for basketball shoes.

Although the use of online qualitative research tools is moving forward, the potential it has for sport management academics has yet to be completely explored. This research project will fill this gap in the literature by contributing the insights of this research project to sport management academics. The next section of this research project will build on the internet literature in order to design a method to gather data from the fans of the Rush, Oilers, and Oil Kings in an interactive form.

Chapter 3: The Research Process

Methodology

The researcher took an interpretive stance to this study. All theorists who fall into the interpretive paradigm tend to have a common perspective: to understand the subjective experience of individuals (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). For interpretivists, the theories are not developed by the observer of action but constructed through the standpoint of the individuals (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), and for this reason the interpretive paradigm best suits the researcher's area of interest.

According to Willis (2007) a paradigm is "a comprehensive belief system, world view, or framework that guides research practice in a field" (p. 8). Burrell and Morgan (1979) have identified four paradigms in social theory and each of the four sets of basic assumptions identifies a separate social-scientific reality. These four paradigms are like a map that helps researchers establish where they are (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The four paradigms, taken together as a map, have led the researcher down the path of the interpretivist paradigm, which best suits the researcher's belief system and worldviews and was used as a guide when working through the research process.

As stated by Burrell and Morgan (1979) the interpretive paradigm adopts the *sociology of regulation* approach through its *subjectivist* method. The interpretive researcher wants to understand the world as it is and wants explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As stated by Burrell and Morgan (1979), the interpretive paradigm tends to be *nominalist*, *anti positivist*, *voluntarist*, and *ideographic* in terms of its approach to social science. Interpretivists "see the social world as an emergent social process which is created by the

individuals concerned” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 28).

Although it is very important to understand the world view of the researcher, it is still important to take the time to briefly discuss the other three paradigms. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), understanding the other basic assumptions allows researchers to be aware of the boundaries within which we approach our subject. Burrell and Morgan (1979) are two theorists who describe the interpretivist paradigm; however, there are many other theorists who also explain the interpretivist paradigm. Burrell’s and Morgan’s (1979) thoughts will be examined first followed by other theorists who also discuss the interpretivist paradigm.

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), the functionalist paradigm is strongly embedded in the *sociology of regulation* and approaches its subject matter from an *objectivist* point of view. This paradigm is concerned with the need to provide explanations of *the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, need satisfaction, and actuality* (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The functionalist is rooted in the tradition of sociological positivism and its approach to social science assumes that “the social world is composed of relatively concrete empirical artefacts and relationships which can be identified, studied, and measured through approaches derived from the natural sciences” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 26).

The radical humanist paradigm is defined by its concern to develop a sociology *of radical change* from a *subjectivist* standpoint (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As mentioned by Burrell and Morgan (1979) the radical humanist paradigm views the social world from a *nominalist, anti positivist, voluntarist, and ideographic* perspective, which can be similar to the interpretive paradigm. However, this paradigm’s view of society highlights

the significance of overthrowing or exceeding the limitations of current social arrangements (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Accordingly the radical humanist paradigm places most of its importance on *radical change, modes of domination, emancipation, deprivation, and potentiality*.

Lastly, the radical structuralist paradigm is entrenched in a *sociology of radical change* from an *objectivist* standpoint (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As stated by Burrell and Morgan (1979) this paradigm is dedicated to *radical change, emancipation, and potentiality*. It shares comparisons with the functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Those who are radical structuralists, approach social concerns from a *realist, positivist, determinist, and nomothetic* point of view. In addition, radical structuralists “concentrate upon structural relationships within a realist social world” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 34). It should be pointed out that the radical structuralist paradigm along with the radical humanist paradigm are sometimes grouped together and called the critical paradigm by other theorists such as Neuman (2003).

Although the understanding of these paradigms is critical to understanding a researcher’s own constraints, epistemology does recognize several approaches to scientific knowledge and according to Rousseau, Manning, and Denyer (2008) there are alternative views within Management and Organizational Science (MOS), which in turn cause disputes regarding the nature of evidence. It can be considered that there is a continuum of epistemological approaches that reflect the social science roots of MOS (Rousseau et al., 2008). At the one end of the continuum is positivism (what Burrell and Morgan (1979) call functionalism), which searches for rationalizations founded on the concept of an integrated reality managed by observable law (Rousseau et al., 2008). As

stated by Rousseau et al. (2008) this paradigm limits the researcher in the questions he or she asks due to positivism's emphasis on universal laws. For this reason, positivism will not allow for this proposed research study to be explored to its full capacity because the researcher wants to hear and learn about the participants' experiences in their social world. For this research project, the positivist lens would not be suitable as it argues that evidence is what can be observed (Rousseau et al., 2008), which is why it is important to look at the other side of the continuum.

At the other end of the continuum is relativism, where no universal reality is presumed (Rousseau et al., 2008). Relativism analyzes verbal behaviour, speech, and print, with an objective of expanding the understanding of the subjects' perspectives (Rousseau et al., 2008). As stated by Rousseau et al. (2008) the relativist approach rejects phenomena in the natural world connected to organizations. Although the relativist approach is similar to the interpretivist approach, the reason for conducting this research through an interpretive lens is because for "interpretivist researchers, organizational and social realities are constructed as a product of theorizing and this individual theorizing itself shapes and affects reality..." (Kim, 2003, p. 13).

Another reason for conducting this study through an interpretive lens is due to the fact that people often derive their identities from their relations with organizations (Baum & Rowley, 2002). As stated by Baum and Rowley (2002) organizations are the infrastructure of our world and could potentially outline our future. "To understand organizations *is* to understand our world" (Baum & Rowley, 2002, p. 1). Moreover, organizations can be considered an open system which means, "organizations are systems of interdependent activities linking shifting coalitions of participants; the systems are

embedded in – dependant on continuing exchanges with and constituted by – the environment in which they operate” (Baum & Rowley, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, because organizations have such an impact on our society, understanding why someone would not want to be affiliated with a specific organization could be helpful to that certain organization or organizations as a whole. In order to gain a complete understanding of why someone would not want to be associated with an organization, the interpretive lens is needed.

For interpretivists, “what the world means to the person or group being studied is critically important to good research in the social sciences” (Willis, 2007, p. 6). When studying the nonfans and fans of the Edmonton Rush franchise, the researcher wanted to be able to interpret the world around them. This is because each nonfan and fan of the Rush has different reasons and experiences to explain why he or she chose to be a fan or not to be a fan. These two types of fans’ subjective realities and subjective perceptions are critical to answering the research questions of this study. Although there were similarities that arose, different environments can create dissimilar worldviews (Willis, 2007). Moreover, as mentioned by Willis (2007), “interpretivists favour qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, and observations because these methods are better ways of getting at how humans interpret the world around them” (p. 6). The qualitative methods mentioned are very similar to the methods that were used for this study, which have assisted with understanding why some people are nonfans and why others are fans of the Edmonton Rush. Furthermore, understanding the context of the research is important because once the data are collected, for an interpretivist, understanding the context is critical when trying to interpret the gathered data (Willis,

2007).

Methods

For this research study, the data were collected using online focus groups, one telephone interview, a demographic questionnaire, along with the collection of documents associated with the Rush's marketing efforts. The method of online focus groups will first be discussed. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) focus groups are forms of interviews that usually consist of six to ten participants led by a moderator. Moreover, it is depicted by a non-directive style of interviewing, where the main objective is to promote different perspectives on the topic being discussed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). However, the focus group that was conducted in this study differed slightly because it was computer-assisted. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) mentioned that even though computer-assisted methods are uncommon, an online method can still be advantageous to those who are geographically distant from their participants. That was the case for this study as there was a lack of funding to travel to Edmonton to conduct these focus groups in person.

The focus group was designed to use a personal forum created over the internet. Originally, the researcher wanted to use WebCT or Sakai, which are programs that assist with the creation of web-based learning environments, to conduct an online, interactive focus group (Kenny, 2005). According to Kenny (2005), the WebCT and Sakai programs are user-friendly, which provide information to the participants, have an interactive discussion board for the focus group to converse, as well as private e-mail that enables the subjects to ask questions about the study. However, after speaking with professionals who work with WebCT and Sakai, it was discovered the two programs were not viable

options. Therefore, the researcher decided to have a website professionally created that included an online forum where the focus group could take place. By doing so, the website and forum were directly designed to suit the needs of the research project.

The participants of this study were selected using purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2002) as cited in Glesne (2006) the reason qualitative researchers purposefully select their participants is because this type of sampling lends itself to selecting information-rich cases that will allow for rich data. The nonfans and fans of this study have been purposefully selected using some different mediums. The mediums that have been chosen are: Facebook ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)), as well as the Rush Lacrosse Fan Forum (edmontonrush.com/forum/), the Official Oilers Message Board (fans.oilers.nhl.com/directory), and the Unofficial Home of all WHL Fans (whlfans.ca/). These websites allowed the researcher to explain the purpose of the research project to potential participants and then invite specific nonfans/fans to participate. To see the message the researcher posted to these potential participants please refer to Appendix E.

As part of this study, eleven participants were recruited, yet by the end of the study there were only ten participants left: six nonfans and four fans. The researcher recruited ten to fifteen participants because Burton and Bruening (2003) suggested that the researcher should recruit ten to fifteen participants for an asynchronous online focus group, with an expectation of about ten remaining fully committed to participating. Those who agreed to participate in the online focus group received a URL address to a website created for this project that led them to the online focus group. In addition, the participants also received a password to enter the online focus group. By having a password it limited access to only those who agreed to participate (Kenny, 2004). The

focus group was comprised of both types of consumers: the nonfans as well as the fans. This is because Schyver and Smith (2005) found that having consumers and nonconsumers in one focus group allowed for the identification of motivation for consumers while determining the barriers for nonconsumers. Furthermore, the two types of participants were able to discuss their differences in opinions, developing richer data (Schyver & Smith, 2005).

The focus group method fit perfectly with this study because of the difficulties one may have in finding the nonfan. However, using online tools may assist sport marketers to find such nonfans. As mentioned in the introduction, for this research project the nonfans selected were fans who attend Oilers' and Oil Kings' games because these teams share the same venue as the Rush (Trail et al., 2008; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995). This makes it more likely for nonfans to become fans of the Rush because they are already willing to attend hockey events in that venue. Due to the game of lacrosse and hockey having similar attributes it only makes sense to include participants who are fans of hockey but not lacrosse. In addition, the Rush fans selected were those who are not only fans but also attend games, in order to ensure rich online focus group discussion. Therefore, these are major justifications for choosing the fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings as well as the fans of the Rush to be the participants of this study.

The focus group similarly followed the strategies used by Kenny (2004). The focus group started on February 8, 2010. On this day, all recruited participants began their participation. The month of February was chosen because this was when all three teams were in season. The focus group was open for four weeks, with the hope for excellent discussion and, in turn, robust data would emerge. Participants could post when

it was convenient for them and they could post as many times as they desired. The researcher acted as the moderator and frequently observed the focus group ensuring that the participants were able to stay on topic.

The focus group questions were developed prior to the start of the focus group and due to the flow of the discussion all questions developed were used (please refer to Appendix F). As the researcher posted new questions to the focus group throughout the four weeks, the original two research questions were kept in mind. The researcher posted follow up questions to the forum if the discussion of a certain topic needed more elaboration. The focus group method was beneficial when trying to understand why nonfans chose not to attend Rush games. A comparison could then be made between the reasons why Rush fans became fans and why they enjoy attending games. Once the findings of this research study are revealed, it will help shed light on how to further increase the Rush's popularity and attendance.

In order to build on the trustworthiness of this research project, in addition to the online focus group the researcher also conducted an open ended telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions. The idea of this interview was to gain an understanding of what types of marketing strategies the Rush franchise were implementing. The telephone interview is similar to an online interview or focus group where there are no visual observations (Neuman, 2003). However, according to Neuman (2003) it does have the strengths of a face-to-face interview, such as the researcher having much control over the interview. The data from this telephone interview complemented the data from the focus group to further the trustworthiness of this research study.

Similar to the telephone interview, to further the trustworthiness of this study the researcher also collected documents that reflected the Rush's marketing strategies. Although according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), document collection is usually conducted when doing ethnography, in the case of this research, document collection was beneficial in order to understand the tactics the Rush franchise has used previously in its marketing techniques. As stated by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) the documents collected can be informal, formal, or official. For the purpose of this study, the researcher collected informal documents. Informal documents include: fictional literature, diaries, autobiographies, letters and mass media products and they can be on paper or in electronic form (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). For this study, most of the informal documents that were collected were from the mass media, which were retrieved over the internet due to the online nature of this study.

In addition to the online focus group, a one-on-one telephone interview, and document collection, the researcher also included a brief state-of-being segmentation questionnaire, which was e-mailed to all participants prior to the start of the online focus group (please refer to Appendix G). The reason for this questionnaire was to be able to further segment the participants. According to Mullin et al. (2007), there are four bases to market segmentation: consumers' state of being (demographics), consumers' state of mind (psychographics), product benefits, and product usage. Yet for this questionnaire the consumers' state of being was only used because the other three segmentation strategies were covered through the online focus group. This demographic questionnaire was administered in order to fully understand where the participants were coming from. Mullin et al. (2007) stated that the state-of-being segmentation includes several

dimensions that are fairly easy to measure. The dimensions include: geography, age, income, education, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity. A study conducted by Zhang Pease, Hui, and Michaud (1995) included a similar demographic questionnaire, but some dimensions differ from Mullin et al. (2007). The items included were: household income, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, and occupation. For this study, elements from both Zhang et al. (1995) and Mullin et al. (2007) were included. The inclusion of these demographic questions prior to the online focus groups furthered the researcher's knowledge of the participants and helped explain their reasoning for not attending Rush games as well as attending Rush games.

Development of data collection method and rationale

The focus group method required the researcher to develop interview questions prior to the four-week focus group. Krueger (1998) suggested using five categories of questions (i.e., opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending) when developing the questions for a focus group. These five categories guided the researcher when creating the focus group questions. Due to the fact that this study was being approached through an interpretivist perspective, the focus group was both exploratory and descriptive in nature. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2008), exploratory interviews are open with little structure, while descriptive interviews search for aspects of the participant's lived world. The researcher applied these concepts to the focus group method.

Even though a set of questions was developed, the researcher did consider that new questions may arise, depending on the flow of the focus group. However, the researcher wanted to be prepared, which meant a set of questions were ready in order to have the best questions possible. Therefore, the researcher did not only use the help of

Krueger (1998) but also used an interpretivist study conducted by Hyatt (2007) to be of assistance when developing the questions. Throughout the focus group, the nonfans and current fans were given freedom to take the focus group down any path they chose; however, the purpose of the research remained the same. The focus group questions were open-ended in nature. The questions asked applied to both fans and nonfans because everyone was a part of the same focus group simultaneously. Then, if the researcher wanted to get more specific to a certain group or individual that was done through probing questions, which were directed to everyone involved with the online focus group (again for focus group question please refer to Appendix F).

The focus group began on February 8, 2010. The researcher recruited the participants for the online focus group twelve days prior to the opening day of the focus group. During the twelve days of recruiting, the researcher asked the recruited participants to read a consent form (see Appendix H) and acknowledge it by responding via email. The participants were also requested to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix G). All participants began the focus group on the set day, to ensure that everyone was able to discuss the same question within the same time frame. A reminder e-mail of the start day was e-mailed to all participants the day the focus group opened. It was expected that everyone responded to question one before moving on to question two and so on. The researcher sent numerous prodding e-mails to those participants who were not as quick to post. The questions that were developed for the focus group allowed for the participants to be very narrative. The researcher anticipated that a narrative would generate rich and thick descriptions of each participant's answer as well as allow each to tell a story. In addition, because the focus group was open-ended, if the researcher

thought of a question that was not scripted, the researcher asked the question that came to mind, which was posted to the whole group. The researcher developed nine questions to allow for as much detail as possible and the questions followed the categories recommended by Krueger (1998).

To further complement the online focus group, the researcher also conducted a telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions. Again this interview took place over the phone due to geographic constraints. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2008) telephone interviews can also be considered a type of computer-assisted interview as telephone interviews also do not have a bodily presence and the researcher does not have access to information expressed in gestures and facial expressions. This is why the questions were thought out thoroughly and developed prior to the interview commencing. The questions for this interview used Kvale and Brinkman (2008) along with Hyatt (2007) as a guideline to ensure the participant gave as much detail and narration as possible. As this telephone interview was only a complement to the online focus group, only five questions were developed (see Appendix I). The researcher was aware that these questions, like the online focus group questions, acted as a guideline and other non-scripted questions were asked throughout the interview.

For the document collection the researcher used mediums such as the Rush's website; the NLL's website; as well as online newspaper articles. These documents gave an idea of how the Rush conducts its marketing efforts within the Edmonton region, which furthered the understanding of the participants as well as the Rush franchise. As mentioned by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) "documentary sources construct 'facts,' 'records,' 'diagnoses,' 'decisions,' and 'rules' that are crucially involved in social

activities” (p. 121). This is why it was so important to include this aspect within the study.

The e-mailed demographic questionnaire included the following items: age, household income, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, occupation, and proximity to Rexall Place. These items were chosen because they gave the best range of demographics as well as furthered the researcher’s insight about the participants. Although demographic questionnaires are usually anonymous, having the participants e-mail them back to the researcher did not guarantee anonymity. However, the subjects were not forced to complete these questionnaires; it was completely up to their discretion. Furthermore due to the online nature of this study, the researcher never really knew who the participants were because the internet allows people to disguise their identity. Moreover, the researcher ensured participants that this information would be used for this research purpose only and that their identities would not be revealed.

Data Analysis

Burton and Bruening (2003), Davis et al. (2004), Folkman Curasi (2001), Kenny (2004), Kitto and Barnett (2007), Kvale and Brinkmann (2008), O’Connor and Madge (2003), and Kozinets (2002) mentioned that an advantage of computer-assisted interviews is that they are already transcribed. However, the researcher cannot ignore this step completely because as stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) interview transcripts are the “solid rock-bottom empirical data of an interview project” (p. 178). Therefore, once the online focus group was complete the researcher cut and pasted the focus group comments and saved them to a Microsoft Word document. Once the discussion was transferred to a Word document, the researcher ensured the transcribed focus group was

formatted properly (i.e., made sure there was space between each person who had posted a comment, and ensured names match that specific person's post).

Each of the data collection methods chosen produced data that needed to be properly analyzed, which entailed meaning coding, meaning condensation, and meaning interpretation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Due to the fact that this research was through an interpretivist lens, the purpose of the research was to learn the stories of the nonfans and current fans and to learn the reasons why they have become the type of fan they are. This meant that these three steps best suited the research and was the method chosen to analyze the collected data. The researcher decided on using Microsoft Word as well as coloured markers to assist with the three steps of analysis. Meaning coding is what Morgan (1988) referred to as ethnographic analysis used for focus groups. Codes developed are to be short and present the experiences illustrated by the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The overall goal of meaning coding is to develop categories that reflect the full experiences and actions of the subjects involved (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). In addition, the research combined meaning coding with content analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Morgan, 1988). According to Morgan (1988) meaning coding “relies more on direct quotations of the group discussions, while content analysis typically produces numerical descriptions of the data” (p. 64). As this research study used a demographic questionnaire the combination of these analysis methods seemed appropriate.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) meaning condensation “entails an abridgment of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations. Long statements are compressed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what

is said is rephrased in a few words” (p. 205). Meaning condensation involves five steps: 1) read data thoroughly; 2) natural meaning units are determined by the researcher; 3) themes that dominate the natural meaning unit are restated; 4) interrogate the meaning unit in order to tie back to purpose; and 5) the non-redundant themes are tied together (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). These five steps were used for the data collected from the focus group, telephone interview, the questionnaire as well as the document collection.

Once the data were coded and condensed, the researcher then interpreted the data looking for “specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships ... ending with a creative synthesis” (Patton, 2002, p. 41). As stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) interpretation is dissimilar to the categorization step. Interpretation recontextualizes the statements within broader frames of reference rather than the decontextualization of statements when categorizing. The interpretation of the data leads to text expansion, where the researcher may find relations of meanings, which may not have been found when coding and categorizing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The three steps of meaning coding, meaning condensation, and meaning interpretation were used for the data collected from the online focus group, telephone interview, the questionnaires as well as the document collection.

As mentioned by Willis (2008), the last step of the analysis process is determining who the audience is and how the researcher is going to communicate the findings to that audience. In the case of this study, there was only one audience that the researcher wanted to reach. Due to the fact that the researcher hopes that this study will have the potential to be transformed into a publishable journal article, the researcher followed the appropriate procedures to write a thesis that can become a publishable

journal article.

Ethical Considerations

Willis (2008) noted that doing research ethically is not just about following a set of rules. According to Willis (2008), some rules can vary depending on your paradigmatic perspective. However, it is still important for one to know the ethical guidelines of his or her specific field and when a question of ethics arises one must understand why there is an argument and have enough ethical comprehension to make an informed decision (Willis, 2008). This study used a focus group in order to get rich data. According to the Office of Research Services (ORS; 2008), research involving interaction with a living human being requires approval from Brock University's Research Ethics Board (REB). The data collection process could not even begin until the REB had reviewed the research proposal and gave the researcher clearance to further proceed with the study (ORS, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used ethical guidelines presented by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008). Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) explained that for the seven stages of research there are ethical issues to be considered. For the thematizing stage, one must have made sure that there was improvement of the human situation being investigated, which this research project did because the researcher wanted to help the franchises of the NLL to better their organizations. The designing stage involved gaining informed consent and attaining confidentiality. For this study, the researcher received informed consent from all participants and made sure their identities were not disclosed to the public or to their fellow participants. In the third stage (interview situation), it was required for the researcher to understand the consequences of interviews or focus groups

for the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Prior to the start of the online focus group it was suggested that the participants be in a place that is most comfortable for them when they are posting their opinions. However, because the participants were responding electronically and they could post whenever they wanted, the participants did not feel the stress and anxiety that some interviews or focus groups may have. For the transcription phase, the researcher made sure that nothing a participant posted or completed through their questionnaire was altered in any way so it remained loyal to the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). However, one exception arose was the fixing of spelling and grammatical errors. In the stage of analysis there was the question whether participants should have a say in how their words were interpreted (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). In order to address this issue, the researcher conducted member checking via e-mail, to ensure the data collected was represented appropriately. Once the online focus group was complete, the researcher e-mailed all participants and asked if everyone could review the online discussion to ensure that each participant was represented appropriately. With regard to the telephone interview, the researcher e-mailed the transcribed interview to the Director of Marketing and Promotions of the Rush to ensure everything discussed was accurate. The verification stage required the researcher to “report knowledge that is as secured and verified as possible” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 63). In order to do this, the researcher took suggestions from professors in sport management; these professors were also the supervisors for this research project. The inclusion of these expert researchers ensured that this study was validated throughout the whole research process. Lastly, in the reporting stage, the researcher made sure that the confidentiality of the participants was maintained when reporting the research results

(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008).

Trustworthiness

For the purpose of this section, the verification procedures adopted from Lincoln and Guba (1985) as well as Glesne (2006) were used as a guide to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. According to these authors prolonged engagement and persistent observation are needed to ensure trustworthiness. Yet, because the research was conducted as part of a Master's program, the researcher was limited in the amount of time spent within the online communities. In addition, a majority of the data was based on the four-week focus group and to ensure there was rich data, there needed to be responsive participants (Folkman Curasi, 2001). Therefore, the researcher attempted to recruit the best participants possible, which required the researcher to be actively engaged during the twelve day recruitment period. Moreover, because the recruitment period was only twelve days, the researcher needed persistent observation.

Another aspect of trustworthiness relates to the clarification of research bias, which is "reflection upon your own subjectivity and how you will use and monitor it in your research" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37). In order to address the research bias, the researcher used *Reflexive Triangulation* developed by Patton (2002; see Appendix J for diagram). The questions in this diagram helped ensure that the researcher's voice expressed authenticity and trustworthiness (Patton, 2002). In addition to the clarification of research bias, the study also completed member checking. As stated by Glesne (2006) member checking involves "sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately" (p. 38). Throughout the study, the researcher continuously completed

member checks with each participant. Due to the fact that most of the data involving participants were gathered through the online focus group, member checking was relatively easy because subjects were able to go through and re-read their comments once the four-week period was completed. Once the focus group was finished, the researcher e-mailed all participants encouraging them to re-read the whole discussion. There is a down side to member checking, due to the fact that the participants have the right to say it is not allowed to be used (Glesne, 2006). Fortunately this was not the case for this research project.

It was ensured that the data received external auditing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne, 2006). Throughout the four-weeks the researcher attempted to ensure that all participants provided rich description, even if it necessitated the encouragement of the researcher during the online focus group. In order to ensure rich and thick descriptions, external audits needed to be completed. An external audit is when an outside person examines the research process and product (Glesne, 2006). Since this study involved a novice researcher, it was imperative to externally audit this research process. This research project was overseen by co-supervisors and one committee member, which allowed the researcher to receive different perspectives and suggestions throughout the study. The inclusion of the verification procedures during this research process allowed the researcher to maintain trustworthiness with the intended audience.

Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

As stated by Patton (2002), the researcher's role is a balance of "understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness" (p. 41). Moreover, according to

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) reflexivity is not based on just a triangle “a rigid, two-dimensional object” (p. 963). It is more based on the characteristics of a crystal, “which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach” (p. 963). Due to the fact that reflexivity is more so based on characteristics of a crystal, the researcher not only used *Reflexive Triangulation* developed by Patton (2002) but also the three categories researchers use to display reflexivity developed by Potter (1996) as cited in Glesne (2006). These three categories included:

- 1) Inquiry into and discussion of decisions affecting the research process:
how the setting is chosen, how access is achieved, how the researcher presents self to participants, how data are recorded
- 2) Inquiry into a discussion of the methods used, accompanied by concerns and questions regarding the data collected and interpretations made
- 3) Inquiry into and discussion of one’s biases and perspectives (p. 125).

As mentioned by Glesne (2006) “In a sense, you conduct two research projects at the same time: one into your topic and the other into your ‘self’ and the ground in which you stand” (p. 126). Therefore, by using *Reflexive Triangulation* and the three categories researchers use to display reflexivity, the researcher maintained a log throughout the course of the research, with all the reflexive notes to ensure the trustworthiness of the data as well as to identify the researcher’s thoughts and reflections.

Throughout these first three chapters there was much detail into the background of the research project, the purpose and justification for conducting this study, a review of the literature, along with an understanding of how the research process unfolded. The

following chapters will analyze and discuss the data followed by directions for future research and concluding thoughts, which will provide implications for the sport marketing discipline.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This research study was designed to address gaps in knowledge in the sport marketing literature not only regarding nonfans but also regarding the use of online research techniques to collect data. The primary purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding through an interpretive lens of the nonfans of the Edmonton Rush. The secondary purpose was to understand the fans of the Rush. More specifically, this study first wanted to understand the reasons why fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings decide not to attend Rush games and second why fans attend Rush games. An online focus group was conducted which allowed the researcher to recognize the benefits of online research gathering tools. Through these findings the researcher hoped to provide insight to other National Lacrosse League (NLL) teams as well as other mid-level sport leagues and teams. Furthermore, the researcher anticipated that the findings from this study would lead to suggested marketing strategies that the Rush can implement to attract nonfans. In addition, this study provides recommendations to sport marketers concerning the use of online research gathering techniques. These findings are important to the sport marketing literature as there is little research on how to attract nonfans as well as the benefits of using the internet to collect data. The sport marketing strategies suggested may not only assist the Rush, the NLL, and other mid-level professional sport teams/leagues but also provide knowledge to sport marketing practitioners and academics. The primary and secondary research questions that were answered are:

1. Why do fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings choose not to attend Edmonton Rush games?
2. Why do fans of the Edmonton Rush attend games?

The previous chapter outlined the methods that were used to analyze the collected data. The current chapter will present and discuss the findings in relation to why nonfans do not attend Rush games and why fans do attend Rush games. As mentioned before, the definition of a fan will be consistent with the Psychological Continuum Model. A fan in this study is either at the attachment or allegiance stage (Funk & James, 2001). The fan has begun a psychological connection towards a sport team or has become quite committed to that specific sport team and at both stages the fan is rooting for that team to win (Funk & James, 2001). In addition, as stated above, the terms nonfans and nonconsumers will be used interchangeably and are defined as those people who are either aware of the sport product and chooses not to attend or is aware of the sport product and consequently do not attend because they are misinformed (Mullin et al., 2007).

The Frequency Escalator (FE) and Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) were used to guide the findings. As mentioned in the chapter prior, the data collection process included one online focus group that included both nonfans and fans of the Rush, a telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, a document collection of materials relevant to the Edmonton Rush as well as a demographic questionnaire. The analysis of this research took three distinct steps adopted by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008). These steps included meaning coding, meaning condensation, and meaning interpretation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The guidance of this analysis method along with the FE (Mullin et al., 2007) and PCM (Funk & James, 2001) allowed the researcher to discover three major themes with subthemes attached to each coded major theme:

1. Decisions of nonfans to not attend Rush games
2. Decisions of fans to attend games
3. Marketing approaches

The subthemes for each major theme are as follows:

- Theme 1 subthemes
 - The hockey connection versus the lacrosse disconnection
 - No interest and lack of entertainment
 - Lack of exposure
- Theme 2 subthemes
 - Edmonton community pride
 - Entertainment value
 - A new sport experience to fall in love with
 - Lacrosse versus hockey
- Theme 3 subthemes
 - Promotion and awareness
 - Non-traditional techniques
 - Traditional strategies
 - Television and media deals
 - League structure.

The major themes that were uncovered for nonfans as well as fans inductively revealed factors that influence sport consumer behaviour, which can be characterized as either environmental or individual (Mullin et al., 2007). Environmental factors consist of significant others, social and cultural norms, social class structure, race and gender

relations, climatic and geographic conditions, technology, market behaviour of firms in the sport industry and sport opportunity structure (Mullin et al., 2007). The individual factors, as stated by Mullin et al. (2007), include one's self-concept, stage in life or family cycle, physical characteristics, learning, perceptions, motivations, attitudes as well as the complex process of consumer decision making itself. For further detail of consumer behaviour in sport please refer to Appendix K. The analysis of all collected and interpreted data and its relevance are presented throughout this chapter. Moreover, to allow the readers to get an understanding of the fans involved please refer to Appendix L, which provides a description of each fan who participated in the online focus group. Lastly, once the findings from the study have been discussed the researcher will also shed light on the opportunities and challenges that were found using an online focus group as a research gathering tool.

Decisions of Nonfans to Not Attend Rush Games

As the literature revealed, research conducted on the nonfan is sparse. Although the FE recognizes the nonfan as a sport consumer segment, little research has been done to determine why some sport fans choose not to be a fan of a specific sport, team or event. Funk et al. (2002); Koo and Hardin (2008); Russell and Goldstein (1995); Schyver and Smith (1995) all mentioned that it is beneficial to include the consumer and nonconsumer when examining consumer behaviour in order to discover the differences between the two groups and their decisions to consume or not. The online focus group discussion revealed that the nonfan participants of this study demonstrated that they were all at the awareness stage on the PCM (Funk & James, 2001) and furthermore could be segmented as nonconsumers on the FE (Mullin et al., 2007). These nonfans revealed

three major sub-themes as to why they chose not to attend Rush games. These sub-themes will be discussed further throughout the next sections.

The Hockey Connection versus The Lacrosse Disconnection

The fans of the Rush revealed the theme lacrosse versus hockey throughout the focus group discussion, which will be examined more closely later on in this chapter. Two of the Rush fans found that hockey, and specifically the Oilers, are what attracted them to become fans of the Rush and lacrosse. Whereas the other two Rush fan participants found positives in both hockey and lacrosse, which led them to becoming fans of the Rush. The nonfan participants revealed a similar theme, however it was uncovered that one of the reasons why the nonfans do not attend Rush games lies in the connection they have with hockey and the Oilers/Oil Kings and the disconnection they have with lacrosse and the Rush. This subtheme (similar to the other subthemes that will be discussed throughout this chapter) can be related to the individual and environmental factors of consumer behaviour in sport as well as the socialization, involvement, and commitment in sport (Mullin et al., 2007). The relation to these concepts will be uncovered through the narrations of the nonfan participants.

One participant mentioned that it is the ownership of hockey that makes Canadians, specifically Edmontonians, so dedicated to hockey and the Oilers and/or Oil Kings. Throughout the focus group it was revealed that the nonfan participants and some Rush fan participants take pride in the culture Edmonton has created around hockey and, in particular, the Oilers. According to Mullin et al. (2007), in the environment surrounding these individuals there are many cultures, subcultures, and countercultures that may nurture different lifestyles. One nurtured lifestyle for these participants is

hockey. When asked what they thought differs from the culture of the Oilers/Oil Kings games compared to the Rush games Nancy responded,

I think the difference is in the culture surrounding the sport as opposed to the culture of the games. The sport of hockey is such an important part of the culture of Edmonton and Canada. It is built into our collective experience as Canadians. The Games [Olympics] represent that. As others mentioned in other posts, at Oilers games the fans seem to know everything and think they know better than the pro players. I think that has to do with the culture of the sport. Hockey is our sport as Canadians so we all have something to say (advice to give) because it belongs to us. Because it is our sport, it means we feel more attached to the team as well. So, as others have said, whether the Oilers are doing well or not- people still show up to the games (sometimes less people, but still people) and cheer (or boo- but make noise) and that ownership of hockey is what sets the culture at the games.

Nancy was one of the two females who participated in this study; however, other male nonfan participants and some fan participants had comparable viewpoints. Similar to Nancy, Ned (a nonfan) also described hockey in Edmonton,

Hockey is EVERYWHERE in Canada. Whether you're listening to the radio and hear an ad, driving down the street and see a billboard or simply having a conversation among friends and the game comes into topic it's hard to go 20 minutes without thinking about hockey. I never played when I was younger, but I always watched and looked for scores and Oilers stats whenever I could. It was something to be excited about.

Nathaniel, a nonfan, described his connection to hockey and the Oilers, making special mention of the 2005-2006 season when the team came within a game of winning the Stanley Cup,

Hockey's brought me closer with my friends and the City of Edmonton as a whole (especially the '06 run). It gives us something to be proud of as well as a sense of accomplishment. It also has its way of humbling, especially when we suck like we do this year.

Even Frank, who is both a fan of the Rush as well as the Oilers, explained the ownership of hockey to Edmontonians,

The culture surrounding hockey is a passion this city has; doesn't matter if it's minor or professional, you're almost guaranteed to have more fans at hockey games. The Edmonton Oilers are our team, our passion and we will always support them. Oil Kings games are their baby sister that we support just because they are related, but not for many other reasons, in my opinion.

Due to this hockey culture in Edmonton, lacrosse seems to have taken a backseat. Edmontonians have a strong connection with hockey and they do not have that same connection with lacrosse, which contributes to the nonfan participants not attending Rush games. There is no ownership of lacrosse like there is with hockey. Neil, a nonfan participant, stated his lacrosse disconnection,

Hockey has made a good impact on me because the Oilers and Oil Kings are a great conversation starter and it is fun when your friends like another team and you bug one another about whose team is better. You feel a sense of pride when your team does well and that brings me closer to the city I call home. As for

lacrosse no one talks about it, I don't know anything about the Rush.

Similar to Neil, Norm also explained his lack of connection to the sport of lacrosse,

I feel no patriotism to hockey because of where I was born or choose to live.

Hockey is simply the most enjoyable sport I have ever been able to participate in.

Because of this I have been able to appreciate the pro level of the sport easier than any other sport on the market. Other sports I am able to participate in I will watch them performed at a higher level. Lacrosse, are you kidding me??? It looks fun but where does a regular person play this recreationally? Every year I am invited to play hockey, baseball, football, soccer, and basketball; never lacrosse. I have no connection to lacrosse because I feel alienated from it.

In addition to the above comments, when the nonfan participants were asked why they choose not to attend games Ned responded,

I don't understand lacrosse as in depth as I do hockey. I'm sure the rules would be easy enough to figure, but I've invested about 15 years of following the Oilers' every move. Knowing the players' names, numbers and playing styles gets me more into the game.

Nancy also adds, "I don't go to Rush games because I don't know the rules of lacrosse, I don't have an emotional stake in the team (because I wasn't raised on the sport, I don't know other fans, etc.), and I have no idea when they play." Not only did the nonfan participants discuss their reasons for not attending but the fan participants expressed their opinion as to why some people choose not to attend. Forrest mentioned,

Surprisingly, though it's Canada's official summer sport, not a lot of people know about lacrosse, let alone the various professional leagues that have grown to represent it. So, when kids grow up in Canada watching sports, they look at

hockey, naturally, but even those that don't will watch baseball, football, soccer and basketball, and much of those sports will come from the U.S. or Europe (soccer). It's not an Olympic sport, it's not usually taught in school P.E. classes, and there aren't any superstars that can draw attention to the sport.

And even when people go to games, it's not as straightforward as a game like hockey or basketball is, where play is continuous, uncomplicated and ball possession determines the direction of movement. Lacrosse has several procedural rules, which I still don't quite understand, even after four years of going to Rush games. To a newcomer, the game must seem overly complicated for how fast it moves. The constantly changing lines, the shot clock, the unusual calls for illegal picks. Not everyone is lucky enough to have season tickets next to a couple of lacrosse experts like I was.

The reasons mentioned as to why nonfan participants do not attend can be attributed to the learning, perception, motivation and attitudes of individual influences (Mullin et al., 2007). Many of the nonfan participants do not attend because of their lack of knowledge of lacrosse whereas the fan participants who have recently consumed the sport have enjoyed learning about the game. According to Mullin et al. (2007), knowledge is an important variable in consumer behaviour; the more you are exposed to the game, the more you want to learn. The lack of lacrosse knowledge for the nonfan participants hinders their desire to be connected to lacrosse. Some Rush fan participants point this out in their responses. Finn stated,

Because the game is so different, just attending a game, does not mean you understand the game. You have to have someone with you to explain rules and

strategies. To take a hockey fan and say there are no off sides, cross checking is legal as well as slashing below the neck and above the waist it will take some time to understand the game and then, knowing what to look for, will start to enjoy the game. I have never missed a game and I do not get angry when people say they would not attend a game. If you don't know the game and there is no education or explanations then why would you?

Frank added, "The sport of lacrosse is not as well known to Edmontonians as hockey is. Lacrosse is a Canadian born sport, and played by a lot of people. But a lot of people don't know the sport, and that uncertainty is probably the reason they don't go." Moreover, Fred mentioned, "It is more like basketball in its defence and transition game and basketball is not a big pro sport in Canada. The play is very fast and can be complex, so most uninitiated spectators tend to lose sight of the ball in rapid fire situations".

As mentioned earlier by Trail et al. (2003) vicarious achievement could be a motive related to fans of successful teams. These authors found that vicarious achievement related to the fan's identification with the team, coach, and community. Vicarious achievement should not be overlooked and its relation to this sub-theme should be recognized. The 2009/2010 Oilers and Oil Kings season was poor for both teams. However, historically the Oilers can be considered a successful NHL franchise which could explain why the hockey fan participants are still attending Oilers games and, as mentioned by one of the participants, people support the Oil Kings because they are the Oilers' baby sister. The hockey connection the hockey fans of this study have can be a contributing factor as to why they continue to attend Oilers games. Their lacrosse disconnection could also be the reason why the nonfan participants did not mention the

performance of the Rush to deter or attract them to Rush games.

Before the 2010 season, the Rush had never made the playoffs. In 2010, the Rush made their first playoff appearance and on top of that made it to their division finals (Loder, 2010). In the telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, along with the newspaper articles collected, it was mentioned that the reason people are not attending is due to the poor performance by the Rush since their inauguration. However, a contrasting observations was made, which was that not one nonfan in this study mentioned that the performance of the Rush had anything to do with their reason not to attend Rush games. In fact, not one of them even stated how poorly the Rush have performed in the past. This is similar to a finding discovered by Fisher and Wakefield (1998), who found that when group performance is low fans pursue alternative ways to connect with the team. The reasons for not attending for the nonfans of this study were due to their lack of connection with lacrosse and the Rush, and not necessarily the lack of success the team has experienced. This finding is dissimilar to Snipes and Ingram (2007), who found that overall team record is an important factor for sport event attendance.

Although some researchers, such as Snipes and Ingram (2007), have found a connection between team performance and attendance, the online participants did not mention the Rush's performance record when asked why they choose not to attend Rush games. In the telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, along with numerous comments in newspaper articles made by owner, Bruce Urban, it is clear the Rush organization is relying on winning performance to increase attendance. However, there is perhaps a disconnect between the owner/Director of Marketing and

Promotions and the participants regarding performance record and attendance as the nonfans do not even discuss or mention the Rush's win/loss record. This disconnect is further supported when the Director of Marketing and Promotions mentioned,

You know, a lot of people do know of us but a lot of things I do hear from people a lot, "oh I've heard of you guys I keep meaning to get out to a game." Some of them have and some of them haven't so one of our biggest challenges is for the first couple of years as a team we just weren't fielding a very good team. We're an expansion team, we had to really start off with a roster that had a lot of guts but not a lot of skill. We did not have a very good record to start off and then there has been a couple of years that we have come really close at making the playoffs but just simply we weren't able to. You know it comes down to the last game of the season and just things wouldn't work our way. So, not having that success on the field I think has slowed us down a little bit; this is a town that really supports its winners but traditionally hasn't supported the losing teams very well.....it's tough to sell and I think actually the club has done quite well considering the on-field history and being able to stick around. And this year we're starting to actually see the results now. We have a winning team this year. We haven't lost a game at home yet.

The Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions also stated,

You know people will come and check us out casually but you know when we weren't doing well on the floor it made it a little harder. Anytime you can walk out of the building with a winning feeling that I think generates a feeling of wanting to come back and be a part of something.

However Fred, a Rush fan, said that even when the Rush lost a game there was always something positive to discuss on the way home.

In addition to the telephone interview, Bruce Urban (Rush owner) was quoted in the *Edmonton Journal* regarding performance and attracting fans,

We had four years in a row of losing, he said Wednesday. The Rush hadn't won more than six games in any of its previous seasons in the NLL. I think when we lost, we couldn't get people to renew. The four years of losing took its toll, Urban continued. The first four years, we definitely felt some pain financially. We've taken some hits and lost a significant amount of money. However, I'm positive and upbeat. Coming into this, I knew it wouldn't be a cakewalk. You're selling a professional sport in a hockey-crazy city, in a hockey-crazy province, so it's tough. Of course, fans in every sport want a winner. When you're out of the playoffs early, like we have been in past years and the Oilers were this year ... you lose that emotional attachment of the fans. You're playing for the playoffs, for that hope of a championship and the fans are there because they want to see the team in the playoffs and make it to the top. Playoffs give fans something to feel good about, and those feel-good moments get fans attached to the teams (Korobanik, 2010, ¶ 4-10).

Although Urban did mention being in a hockey devoted city is a contributing factor, he also mentions how poor performance has turned people off attending Rush games. Poor performance was not mentioned by the nonfan participants as a reason not to attend games. When the participants were asked why they choose to attend or not to attend, not one participant mentioned performance. However it was mentioned that one of the main

reasons nonfans of this study are not attending Rush games is due to the hockey connection and the lacrosse disconnection that make up the professional sport climate in Edmonton.

No Interest and/or Lack of Entertainment

Due to the lack of research conducted on understanding why some consumers decide not to consume a specific sport product, this sub-theme was not revealed in the literature review. One of the contributing factors that has led the nonfan participants not to attend Rush games or become Rush fans is simply because they have no interest in the Rush or the sport of lacrosse, or they have been to a game and did not find it entertaining. Again, this can be correlated with the individual influences of consumer behaviour in sport. According to Mullin et al. (2007), "Consumers and prospective consumers are constantly filtering and interpreting cues about sport products vis-à-vis their self concepts. Failure to provide congruent and consonant images to consumers will typically reduce involvement" (p. 82). Of the six nonfans, two had attended a Rush game and both of them had similar feelings. Natalie mentioned,

I would not spend the money to go back to a Rush game as I don't find it entertaining or thrilling in any way....I just don't find it interesting at all...and didn't find it as entertaining as (Oil Kings) hockey....I do not understand lacrosse.

Norm felt similar to Natalie as he stated,

I went to a Rush game the first year they played in Edmonton. I found the game confusing and the crowd was mostly families and kids which I feel uncomfortable around when I want to have a good time. I found myself not really following the game half way through. It never did leave a positive impression for me to warrant ever going back again.

Although the rest of the nonfan participants had not been to a Rush game two of them stated that they are not interested in attending, Neil stated,

As for lacrosse no one talks about it. I don't know anything about the Rush and frankly I don't care. I would much rather go to an Oilers or Oil Kings game than go to a Rush game... I don't like lacrosse at all...lacrosse sucks.

Nathaniel also mentioned that he has no interest in attending Rush games,

The reason I'm not interested in going to Rush games is because if I'm going to take four hours out of any given day, it will be to watch top calibre NHL players, and I'm not a lacrosse fan...nobody I know is a fan of the Rush or the NLL. To me, that says that: A- Its not an entertaining spectator sport...

The other two nonfan participants both mentioned in the focus group that they would consider going to Rush games but need a little something more to get them hooked on the team and the sport. When considering the FE, these two nonfan participants would be a good target market for the Rush so the organization can get nonfans on and up the escalator. Ned discusses his disinterest in attending Rush games compared to his love for the Oilers,

Lacrosse isn't quite everywhere. There are still the billboards and what not, but there isn't the same obsession with it like there is with hockey. There were never the big names to look for or the same intrigue about it. I still like the game, but I just don't find it as interesting as hockey...I don't have anything against either the Rush or the Oil Kings, but I just don't get the same sense of pride or excitement when I think about them.

Nancy stated in the focus group that she and her husband do keep meaning to go to a Rush game but have yet to do so. However, she did hope that if she were to go it would

be a similar experience to when she used to go to the Edmonton Drillers games (indoor soccer league), which in her explanation, it seemed that Drillers games and Rush games can be very comparable. Nancy went on to explain,

Of the three teams, I have only been to an Oilers game at Rexall. However, many moons ago I went to a Drillers game and thought that experience might be of interest. What struck me the most was how much harder they try to make it a "fun" atmosphere. At Oilers games they have a few contests, play some music, but it isn't that much about atmosphere. At the Drillers game, the music never stopped, it was much more upbeat. There weren't awkward breaks when TV feeds went to commercials. It was a far more upbeat experience. I was very impressed. I like Oilers games, but I go for the hockey not always for the atmosphere. I mean, yes, during playoffs everyone gets pumped up and yes, seasons where we have done better than this one have been more exciting, but it isn't my main reason for going.

If I was to go to a lacrosse game, I would want the same experience as the Drillers, something to get me hooked on the sport. Fun, exciting, etc.

The no interest and/or lack of entertainment sub-theme was another reason why nonfans do not attend Rush games, poor performance was not given as a reason to not attend. Forrest actually mentioned, "People abandon teams not because they're always losing (the Rush still have fans despite not being a very winning team), it's because they don't feel the team has anything to offer them anymore." In terms of performance, the Rush had its best season yet, winning ten out of its sixteen regular season games and making it to their first ever appearance in the division final (NLL, 2010). Although none

of the Rush playoff games were at home or televised (Urban as cited in Barnes, 2010), the Rush still won five of its eight home games (NLL, 2010). Yet, this positive performance did not increase attendance. According to Korobanik (2010) and Tutk (2010), attendance for the Rush in the 2010 season dropped to an average of about 7,600, which is down from approximately 8,800 in 2009 and a high of 10,800 in 2007. Any team in any league want to be winners; however, it may not always be a deciding factor for nonfans when making a decision to attend a game or not. Some of the nonfan participants are just not interested in attending or were not entertained when they did attend. This sub-theme is an aspect the Rush needs to consider and implement marketing techniques that spark interest and entertainment. Marketing techniques have the potential to be enhanced whereas it is difficult to know how well a team will perform each season.

Lack of Exposure

The lack of exposure sub-theme also inductively emerged throughout the focus group discussion. The lack of exposure is a contributing factor to nonfans not attending Rush games; this lack of exposure was recognized not only by the nonfans but also by the Rush fans. Lack of exposure of the Rush correlates with the market behaviour of sport firms (the 5 P's), which is an environmental influence to sport consumer behaviour (Mullin et al., 2007). According to Mullin et al. (2007), the behaviour of sport organizations has important implications for consumer participation. The telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions revealed that the organization is trying its best to expose the Rush as much as possible, which was recognized when the Director of Marketing and Promotions said,

Our walk ups are getting a little bigger now, which is helping and it's really a

matter of trying to figure out how to get as many eyeballs on our name as possible. And that's hitting as many events with the people that we can with our mascots and our dance team, creating strong corporate sponsorships with local businesses here. Showing up at a lot of their events. It's really, at the end of the day, how many people can you expose yourself too.

Although the Rush organization does recognize the need for as much exposure as possible, the nonfans did point out that not being exposed to the Rush and lacrosse is one of the reasons for not attending Rush games. As mentioned previously by Ned (nonfan), hockey in Canada is everywhere and although there are billboards and such, lacrosse is not quite as everywhere as hockey. Moreover, Forrest, who is a fan of the Rush as well as the Oilers, stated that "Every Canadian knows hockey, but not everyone is aware that lacrosse is Canada's official summer sport." Being unaware of lacrosse was also expressed by Frank, who is also a fan of the Rush as well as the Oilers, "Lacrosse I honestly didn't know much about, until the Edmonton Rush was introduced. I knew about the sport, played it a bit when I was in high school, but really didn't follow it." In addition, Neil and Norm, who are both nonfans, also commented on the sport of lacrosse and its lack of exposure. Neil feels that no one ever talks about lacrosse and he does not know anything about the Rush and Norm mentioned that he has never been exposed to lacrosse recreationally, which has alienated him from the sport.

When the participants were asked, "why do you choose not to attend Rush games or why do you think people may not want to attend Rush games?", two of the four Rush fan participants mentioned lack of exposure as a definite barrier to attracting fans. Frank and Forrest both mentioned that lacrosse, along with the Rush and the NLL need more

exposure for people to attend and see what the Rush is all about; the league needs to get its name recognized and reach more people. Nancy, along with four of the other nonfan participants, agreed with Frank and Forrest. Nancy does not attend Rush games not only due to her lack of connection but also because she has no idea when the Rush games are. She further goes on to say, “Just keep trying to get exposure...” In addition to Nancy’s comment Natalie stated,

I also believe that exposure, whether it be online, magazines (local), television, radio, etc. is mainly needed for the Rush. I think that many people do not know of the lacrosse team and if they were given more publicity the everyday nonfans would be interested to go see what the Rush is all about.

Norm, Nathaniel, and Ned all mentioned that the Rush organization needs to find a way to get nonfans to understand lacrosse and more promotion is important to exposing the game of lacrosse and the Rush.

According to Mullin et al. (2007), television has contributed to the vast distribution of sport events and plays a significant part in enlarging the base of consumers for that specific product. However, as of now, neither the Rush nor the NLL have a television contract (Tutka, 2010), so very few if any Rush games are televised. Not having a television contract poses a challenge to the Edmonton Rush and its ability to expose its product. In the focus group, Fred, a fan of the Rush, stated the need for a television contract, “The NLL needs to strike a T.V. deal...Getting the local media on side is important, recently it has improved, but in past years it has been pathetic if not hostile....I think the key is local and national exposure.” The Rush’s Director of Marketing and Promotions also noticed the recent improvement of local media,

We've noticed the press who has always been good to us but they are giving us a little more attention now, which is great. You know it used to be when we have a game our story would be appear on page 7, 8, or 9. Well, recently our stories have been appearing on page 2, 3, 4 and actually our last home game appeared on the front page of the sports section, which is fantastic because it was on Sunday and that was the Canada US game [2010 Olympic Games round robin].

Although this is a start to exposing the Rush throughout Edmonton more, and according to Urban the NLL is working on a television deal (Urban, 2010 as cited in Barnes, 2010), the nonfans are still not attending games not only because of their lacrosse disconnection, or their lack of interest but also due to the lack of exposure the Rush has throughout the City of Edmonton.

Decisions of Fans to Attend Rush Games

Research on motives/factors that make fans more loyal/attached/identified has revealed numerous reasons why fans decide to attend a sport game or event. Some of these many reasons include the identification of community (Sutton et al., 1997; Trail et al., 2003), the recognition of team history and tradition (Sutton et al., 1997), the motivation of entertainment (Wann et al., 2008), or, as mentioned above, the motives that influence sport consumer behaviour which can be categorized as either environmental or individual (Mullin et al., 2007). With the guidance of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001) the focus group discussion revealed that the four Rush fan participants were all at the attachment stage and have the potential to reach the allegiance stage. Alternatively, from the FE perspective (Mullin et al., 2007), these participants could also be considered medium to heavy users. While at these stages of the PCM and the FE, the Rush fan

participants of this study uncovered some of the motives mentioned above, along with other factors to be influential in their decisions to attend Rush games. When analyzing the data regarding the decisions of fans to attend Rush games, four subthemes emerged. The creation of subthemes for this major theme allowed for a better understanding of the shared experiences of Rush fans who attend Rush games.

Edmonton Community Pride

According to Heere and James (2007), the use of sport teams to identify with a community becomes evident when teams use their city in their team name (e.g., Edmonton Rush, Toronto Rock). As stated by Madrigal (2001), many sport organizations try to build community pride around a team through different marketing techniques to further strengthen team identification. Previous sport consumer behaviour research has identified community as a strong motivator for fans to attend sporting events (Funk et al., 2004; Kolbe & James, 2000; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Mullin et al., 2007; Snipes & Ingram, 2007; Sutton et al., 1997; Trail et al., 2003; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). It has been said that community is a common reason people give for any sport involvement (Kolbe & James, 2000; Mullin et al., 2007; Robinson, Trail, & Kwon, 2004; Trail et al., 2003). In relation to these studies, a number of participants mentioned being a proud Edmontonian was one of the reasons for attending a Rush game or perhaps even considering to attend a Rush game. Of the ten participants who were involved in the focus group, four mentioned that the Edmonton community pride was influential in their past attendance and/or possible future attendance. The four participants who mentioned community revealed similar attributes through the demographic questionnaire. For instance, all of these participants lived the same distance from Rexall Place, six to ten kilometres. This

similarity could contribute to their similar feelings toward their community as they live closer to the City of Edmonton as opposed to those participants who live just outside the city, eleven to twenty kilometres away. These participants are closer to Edmonton's community events and probably are more exposed to them compared to those participants living in the suburbs. The subjects' community motive is consistent with the individual influences mentioned by Mullin et al. (2007), which falls under the motivational influence of community.

Of the four participants who were influenced by community pride, Forrest seemed to be the most motivated. He explained that he had never even seen a lacrosse game until the Edmonton Rush were introduced and now he is an evangelist for a sport that four years ago he knew nothing about. Forrest stated, "It has also made me proud to be an Edmontonian, cheering on the home team. I feel it's something all good Canadians should do." Forrest was first introduced to the Rush because his work purchased blocks of tickets. Forrest went to a game and fell in love with the sport, "And since I've always been a patriotic Edmontonian, having a new professional sports team to cheer on made it that much easier to be patriotic." When asked why Forrest is a fan of the Rush he said, "I enjoy having a local team that I can take pride in. Cheering a home team is great and makes me feel like a real sports fan."

Fred, Frank and Ned also mentioned Edmonton community pride as being a reason for attending Rush games or influencing future attendance. When Fred was asked why he is a fan of the Rush he responded, "It is a great game that promotes scoring, hitting, community, and the game. I am very thankful that Bruce Urban stuck with it, I am not certain many owners would have." Fred further went on to say,

This group (the online focus group) has been an excellent cross section of Edmonton sports people - those that have no idea that there even was a lacrosse team in Edmonton, those too close-minded or disinterested to expose themselves, those willing to give it a chance, and those that are already sold on it.

When Frank was discussing why he was a fan of the Rush he stated, "The Edmonton Rush is a great organization that is deserving of great fans, and you'll find no better fans than the fans of Edmonton." Ned also mentions in the focus group that Edmonton community pride is a motivator. Although Ned is not a fan of the Rush and has never been to a game, he still said he would consider attending a game, "I've never been to a Rush game, but would consider going. A night out to cheer on the home team is always welcome in my books." These participants demonstrated that Edmonton community pride is an influential motivator to attending Rush games.

This finding is consistent with the literature mentioned above. Specifically, Sutton et al. (1997) mentioned that providing opportunities for community affiliation or pride is an important strategy to increase fan identification. Three of the participants are already fans of the Rush so enhancing their community pride may help them move up the FE or the PCM. Moreover, if the Rush emphasizes Edmonton community pride, it may assist nonfans like Ned to step on and possibly move up the FE. According to Funk and James (2001), a person can be at different stages of the PCM for different sports. This is the case for Ned as he defines himself as a die hard Oilers fan, which could place him on at the attachment or allegiance stage, whereas he is only at the awareness stage for the Rush. If the Rush recognizes the importance of Edmonton community pride the organization may not only be able to make current fans more loyal but perhaps also move some nonfans

past the awareness stage on the PCM.

Entertainment Value

Many researchers have looked at the financial cost and its relation to consumers' decisions to attend a sport event (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Sutton et al., 1997; Trail et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 1995). Yet, the researchers have dissimilar findings. For instance, Hansen and Gauthier (1989) and Zhang et al. (1995) discovered that financial cost had a negative effect on attendance, whereas Sutton et al. (1997) and Trail et al. (2008) found that price typically did not constrain participants from attending a sport event. The findings from this study differed slightly from the researchers mentioned above. Although the lower ticket price of Rush games compared to Oilers games was a factor, it was the entertainment value they received when attending the Rush games that made them enthusiastic about attending. To further understand the entertainment value Rush fans receive, knowledge of the differences in ticket prices is needed. The cost for one lower bowl mid-surface Rexall Place ticket for the Oilers is approximately \$215.00, for the Oil Kings it is approximately \$30.00 and for the Rush it is approximately \$70.00 (Edmonton Oilers, 2010; Edmonton Oil Kings, 2010; Edmonton Rush, 2010). On the other hand, the cost of an upper bowl ticket for an Oilers game is approximately \$68.00. For the Oil Kings it is around \$15.00 in a promotional section called the ATB Financial Zone. Similar to the Oil Kings, the Rush also have a promotional section called the Safeway Section and seats are approximately \$20.00.

Of the four Rush fan participants, three attended Rush games because they felt they got more value out of the price they paid for the product on the floor compared to the price of Oilers and Oil Kings and the product they put on the ice. When asked how

the game of lacrosse has impacted their life Finn responded,

I enjoy the fact that most people around us enjoy the game due to the fact that most of us never had a chance to play and the cost of tickets are reasonable. I am tired of going to an Oilers game and listening to all the experts complain about how these million dollar players should improve and this is coming from people who never played hockey and this is compounded by the bad run of games they are in. I'll stick to lacrosse where I'm still learning and enjoying the game and if they lose it's easier to take when the front row ticket was \$40.

In relation to Finn's comment Fred stated "Even with a losing season I felt I got my money's worth and that the players truly gave it their all on the floor." Finn and Fred are both married and share similar thoughts, however Frank who is single also feels that he gets more value out of Rush games. When Frank was asked about the experience of attending Oil Kings or Oilers game he responded,

The Oil Kings remind me a bit of what it's like to be at an Edmonton Rush game, but Rush games compared to Oil Kings games, you get your money's worth going to an Edmonton Rush game. Higher scoring, more fights, and a good crowd.

Although three of the four Rush fans felt that attending Rush games compared to Oil Kings' and/or Oilers' games was worth the entertainment value, Fred seemed to have the strongest opinion of the three. When Fred was asked how lacrosse has impacted him he mentioned,

I think lacrosse has a blue collar reputation which is great to me because it comes with a blue collar ticket price. I cannot imagine paying 70-100 dollars a ticket to go watch pro hockey with the lack of parity, lack of effort and systems play

designed to keep scoring down. Give me a 14-13 final score at a lacrosse game over a 1-0 hockey game any day.

Throughout the focus group Fred continues to compare the value of Rush games compared to the value of Oilers and Oil Kings games,

I have been to 3 Oil Kings games. They were through promotions at my children's schools. Again, I was impressed with the play and the fan interaction, far more than the Oilers; however, the price point on the tickets is a barrier. Sports for us is a family affair and buying 4 x \$35 tickets is goofy for 2 hours of entertainment. I make decent money, but when evaluating bang for the buck - Lacrosse wins for us.....When the product [Oilers] on the ice was exciting to watch, it was a good show for a "reasonable" price. I attended a game last November and sat in a set of \$240 (\$480 total) seats that were given to me. It was a good game, but ridiculously priced for the product on the ice. The Oil played "OK" but lost, the crowd was quiet and the in stadium entertainment was sparse. It was my 9 year old son's first pro hockey game and he identified that he preferred the Oil Kings over the Oilers and liked lacrosse best of all.

Fred goes on further to mention, "I bought my first [Rush] seasons tickets for \$200 a seat - \$800 total. That would be 2 Oiler games in the same seats for my family...I have been both a retail ticket buyer and a season ticket holder and have found value in both."

Although these three Rush fans found that there is entertainment value in attending Rush games, Ned, a nonfan participant thought the opposite,

I was planning on attending [a Rush game] maybe a month or two ago and found that seats were around \$50 - \$70. I was looking to pay more in the \$30 range. I

guess that doesn't make much sense as they have to do their best to make a profit, but paying \$70 to watch a game I'm not completely sure of the rules and without knowing any of the team dynamics was a little bit of a put off.

The differences in opinions correspond with the different findings the researchers mentioned above also had. Moreover, it relates to the environmental and individual influences on consumer behaviour in sport (Mullin et al., 2007). All of the participants mentioned in this section are affected by the market behaviour of each sport firm (i.e., the Rush, Oilers, and Oil Kings) and these market activities revolve around the five P's of marketing (price, place, promotion, product, and public relations; Mullin et al., 2007). Furthermore, they are influenced by individual factors such as perception (Mullin et al., 2007), which could demonstrate the reasoning behind the differences in opinions.

A New Sport Experience to fall in Love With

In the fan connection section of the literature review many different motives for attending sport events were discussed. Some of these motives included: social interaction, eustress, group affiliation, participation, entertainment, direct experience and physical skill (Funk et al., 2004; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Sutton et al., 1997; Trail et al., 2003; Wann et al., 2008). Some of these motives were uncovered in the data analysis. However, the researcher found that the comments made by the Rush fan participants strongly correlated with Funk and Pastore's (2000) finding of the attitude measure of direct experience. According to Funk and Pastore (2000), "an individual's attitude structure may influence decisions about type, amount or exposure frequency of promotional material necessary to maintain or change existing behaviour" (pp.180-181). These authors found that the attitude measure of direct experience was one of the most effective predictors of

loyalty towards a professional sport team. This is important to the Rush organization because it will assist with identifying where its fans reside on the FE as well as the PCM.

Not only do the comments made by the Rush fan participants correlate with Funk and Pastore's (2000) findings but their comments also compare to the socialization of sport as mentioned by Funk, Filo, Beaton, and Pritchard (2009). As mentioned by these authors, "socialization represents a desire for sociability and the extent to which a person perceives attending a sport event as an opportunity to interact with family, friends, and other spectators" (p.129). Furthermore, through the sport event experience there are opportunities to enhance human relationships through external interaction with other spectators, participants, friends, and family (Funk et al., 2009). According to Funk et al. (2009) this definition is relatable to group affiliation, family bonding, friends bonding, social interaction, and camaraderie (Funk et al., 2004; Madrigal, 2001; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995).

Even though all four of the Rush fan participants demonstrated that the Rush is a great new sport experience, two of them enjoy this new experience through the socialization at Rush games that they can share with their families, whereas the other two just enjoy the socialization that occurred during Rush games. This difference could be due to the fact that Finn and Fred are married, while Frank and Forrest are single. Finn demonstrated that the Rush is a great new sport experience for his family when he revealed his enthusiasm for socialization with the Rush franchise,

I received my first Rush ticket as a Christmas present from my kids and they would also attend the first ever game. Never having seen box lacrosse we were so excited, about the game, that the family has never missed a game. With the legal

cross checking, pick plays, hits, stick work and fights it is very entertaining.

In comparison, Fred also says that lacrosse, and the Rush in particular, give something that he can share with his son and daughter and, according to Kolbe and James (2003), some people may find the event (like attending a game) more important than the actual team.

In addition to the online focus group, in one of the newspaper articles found on the Rush and its struggles to stay afloat, Counsellor Kim Krushell of Edmonton demonstrated her support for Edmontonians to experience this alternative sport option through the socialization that the Rush can provide. She mentioned that she hopes lacrosse will stay and the Rush can discover ways to survive (Krushell as cited in Ho, 2010). She further went on to say, “I’d want more Edmontonians to go out and see it because it’s fun family entertainment” (Krushell as cited in Ho, 2010, ¶ 10).

Although Fred does enjoy the new sport experience the Rush has given him and his family, he has also shared this with friends and co-workers,

In the five seasons the Rush have been in town I have organized friends and coworkers to go for group block seating... the general consensus is that they return and in four cases have become season ticket holders.

Like Fred’s experience with his friends and co-workers, Frank and Forrest also enjoyed the socialization that occurred during the Rush games. Forrest stated, “I feel like a bigger part of the crowd and that my voice is better heard, and I’m less restrained in my overt team fanboyism.”

Funk et al.’s (2009) definition of socialization deals with the social experience one has with family, friends, peers, or co-workers. However, there is another concept to

socializations and it refers to the environmental and individual factors specifically relating to the socialization, involvement, and commitment of a sport consumer's experience (Mullin et al., 2007). These authors mentioned that socialization requires two-way interaction with the individual and the environment. As stated by Mullin et al. (2007), socialization in sport needs some type of involvement (i.e., behavioural, cognitive, and affective) and involvement implies commitment, which includes looking at the frequency, duration, and intensity of the sport involvement. For instance sport consumers who move up the FE demonstrate a stronger commitment. All four of the Rush fan participants demonstrated socialization, involvement, and commitment towards the Rush franchise as a great new sport experience to fall in love with.

Frank shows how the Rush is a great alternative sport experience through socialization when he stated,

I became a fan of the Edmonton Rush after going to my first game...the intensity of it, having Yukon Jack [team mascot] harassing the other team, the energy, etc. All those things combined, along with the high scoring that's a part of it, made me a fan. I really wasn't sure what to expect when I went to my first game when the Rush joined the NLL, but I'm glad they did.

The Rush fan participants' great experience was also reflected through their involvement with the team. During the focus group, Fred recollected when the Rush first came to town and he mentioned how his involvement has impacted his Rush experience,

I had seen junior/senior lacrosse games. When I heard that the Rush was starting a club, I got in early following the team's website, voting on a team name (I did not vote for "Rush"), my son handed Rory Graves his jersey at the team's introduction

at West Edmonton Mall... I have been a supporter since day one.....In the Rush's inaugural season my son got two opportunities to play on the floor of Rexall Place during the ½ time show. He has grown up thinking playing at Rexall is common place, but when I compare the probability of that happening at an Oilers' game it adds a bit of spark to a Rush event. Whether or not it is my child, I think watching amateur games at a pro venue is a great way to show how involved a team is in the grass roots.

Forrest also mentioned his initial introduction to the team when he stated, "During the Rush's inaugural season, my company bought blocks of tickets to several of the home games. I attended a couple of these and fell in love with the sport. It was a good time to get in on the ground floor of a neat sport and a home team." Furthermore, when Forrest was asked why he was a fan of his team his response reflected how he is a part of the team, "Even though we didn't start out well, the Rush has greatly improved and now we're starting to win games consistently and I like that too. Getting in on the ground floor of a new thing that's likely to succeed is a great feeling." This statement is consistent with a finding from the study conducted by Hyatt and Andrijiw (2008). These authors had two participants explain the positives of cheering for expansion teams since they were founded in that they "expressed a great deal of appreciation and pride in being able to claim the longest tenure of fandom with their particular teams" (p. 351).

According to Mullin et al. (2007), the type of involvement these Rush fan participants experience is behavioural involvement, which is the hands-on experience. For instance, it includes the activities of fans at a game, watching, listening and rooting (Mullin et al., 2007). Like Fred and Forrest, Frank and Finn also discuss their positive

experience through their behavioural involvement when attending Rush games. When Frank and Finn were asked why they were fans of the Rush, in each of their responses they described their experience through their behavioural involvement. Frank stated, "I'm a Rush fan because of the high excitement that happens during each game, the higher physical play during the games compared to hockey games and the calibre of talent lacrosse players have." Finn's response was,

The game is designed for non-stop action and that is one reason I find the game so exciting. There is no coasting or off-sides so they use the entire field at all times.

With an average of 20 goals and over 80 shots per game, to me, this is action. Add the dance team with upbeat music and this makes it lacrosse.

In addition to the online focus group, the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions revealed in the telephone interview his initial involvement experience with the Rush,

To be honest, before I started working for the team I had never even seen a game before... But you know watching it for the first time I was in complete awe as to the athleticism and the durability that these guys have...it's a very violent sport (chuckles) the guys are very skilled and I find it very entertaining.

As mentioned previously, when fans have involvement it comes with a stage of commitment. In the Rush fan participants' responses; this alternative sport experience demonstrated their new commitment to the team. For instance Forrest stated,

Ever since I attended my first Rush game, I have become a "sports fan." I own Rush-branded clothing and the keychain, I own a jersey on which I intend to have my name attached and I've become an evangelist for a sport I didn't even watch or know anything about four years ago.

Frank also demonstrated his positive experience has led to further commitment, “Since the Rush has been introduced to Edmonton, I've become more and more a fan of the sport, loving the action and intensity it offers. It's like it's advertised, it's hockey with balls, and I'm loving it!” As stated by Mullin et al. (2007), commitment refers to the willingness one has to spend money, time and energy on a certain sport involvement and Fred demonstrated his willingness when he said,

I have found that even at a game when the Rush has performed poorly there was usually something positive about the evening to talk about on the way home - the crowd, the action on the floor, the entertainment, etc.. I have been both a retail ticket buyer and a season ticket holder and have found value in both.

The four Rush fan participants of the online focus group demonstrated their socialization, involvement and commitment through their direct experience with the Rush organization which has made these four participants fall in love with the team and the sport of lacrosse. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kolbe and James (2003) who discovered there can be different aspects that serve as the target for people's identity with a team. According to Kolbe and James (2003), a team “may be represented in people's minds as a real or ephemeral entity and could represent different things to different people” (p. 40). By understanding the sport experience, it can further assist sport organizations to determine their current fans' loyalty, which will identify their position on the FE and PCM.

Lacrosse versus Hockey

This last sub-theme was a theme that inductively emerged throughout the data analysis. Of the four Rush fan participants two of them, Fred and Finn, seem to have

become Rush fans because they have been either turned off by hockey in general or are displeased with the Oilers organization. On the other hand, the other two Rush fan participants, Forrest and Frank, who are younger than Fred and Finn, found that the Rush and lacrosse are a nice complement to hockey. Further Rush games are as enjoyable as Oilers games but the two franchises have their differences. These findings strongly correlate with the individual influences of consumer behaviour in sport, presented by Mullin et al. (2007). More specifically, the individual influences these findings correlate with are the learning, perception, motivation and attitudes along with the stage in life or family cycle (Mullin et al., 2007). For instance, Fred and Finn are older than Forrest and Frank and they are also married with children, whereas Forrest and Frank are both single in the 19 to 34 age range. This means that Fred and Finn are likely to be at a different stage in their life and family cycle and may have different perceptions, motivations and attitudes towards the franchises involved in this study. For example, when asked how lacrosse or hockey has impacted their lives, Fred expressed his emotions towards hockey and lacrosse,

I have had a life long exposure to hockey. My Dad was a goalie up to the junior level in Ontario, I played from 6 years old to a short stint in junior “A” and a couple of seasons in junior “B.” I quit hockey at 20 and never skated again ‘til my daughter wanted to take up ringette when I was 38. I had a couple of incidents in my experience that drove me away from the game – directly related to coaching personnel and their idea of competition – that is another Masters study in itself. I also played four years for the Edmonton Wildcats Junior Football team. I am not a hockey fan, I dropped off the NHL bandwagon the last season Jason Arnott was

playing for the Oilers – that was the straw that broke the camel’s back. I started playing again in a co-ed league with my wife, but I only watch the juniors or World Cup/Olympics - almost never the NHL....I would have traded all my hockey and football experiences to play lacrosse, but growing up in Fort Saskatchewan in the ‘80’s there was no such thing....I cannot imagine paying 70-100 dollars a ticket to go watch pro hockey with the lack of parity, lack of effort and systems play designed to keep scoring down. Give me a 14-13 final score at a lacrosse game over a 1-0 hockey game any day.

Through this narration one can see how Fred’s attitude and perception of hockey and the Oilers has changed throughout his life and family cycle, which has led him to become a fan of lacrosse and the Rush. This negative perception of hockey and the Oilers was voiced by Fred within the focus group,

Hockey has a strange place in peoples’ hearts around here. We have family friends that put \$7,000 this year into their AAA midget players’ season and \$50 a month into his RESP to secure his future... Insane?... You make the call.

I attend Oiler games for a ridiculous fee and watch people leave before it is over to "beat the rush"...Insane?...I am at a loss.

Lacrosse is not going to make any millionaires, so people are a little more realistic that little Johnny is not going to take care of them in their retirement. However, I am acquainted with four boys in the Edmonton lacrosse scene that are getting full ride scholarships to US universities through lacrosse.

...It is a shame because once I learned the [lacrosse] rules... about three games, it is far more exciting to watch than a hockey team whose key strategy is to dump it

in the corner and cycle the puck along the boards for 20 seconds.

Although Finn also expressed his emotions towards hockey and lacrosse, he does not give a vivid picture of how it has affected him throughout his life and family cycle.

Nonetheless, his frustrations towards the Oilers were demonstrated,

I have been to many Oilers games, when I received company tickets, and it seems that everyone around me, regardless of the seat location, was either doing a play-by-play announcer or a verbal coach who has experience based on years of watching the game in person or on TV. To listen to a person who gets stuck in the seat when the arm rests are down yelling at an Oiler, who can't hear him, to skate faster really bothers me. The Oil Kings fans are more relaxed, maybe because of the lower costs, but they seem to be more forgiving of the players and enjoy the game. It is really nice to watch the game and I go to as many games as possible....

The Oilers have an established fan base which has been built-up over the years and that is why its captain can be quoted in the paper saying "it doesn't matter what we do on the ice as long as we fill the seats." The other two "new" teams are trying to establish a fan base and will offer the fans, besides the game, a lot more in the way of celeb guests, contests and give-aways. This makes the fans of the new teams appreciative for their attendance, at least I do.

In contrast to Fred and Finn's frustrations, Frank and Forrest express their positive attitudes towards both the Rush as well as the Oilers. Earlier in this chapter Frank discussed that he is a fan of the Rush because of the high excitement, the physical play, and the calibre of talent lacrosse players have. However, Frank is not only a fan of the Rush but he is also a fan of the Oilers; however, for different reasons,

I've always been an Oilers fan, and probably always will be just because they are my home town team and I love them, regardless how much they suck this year.

I'm a fan because of the tradition the team has, but more importantly, because of how passionate Edmontonians are about their hockey team, and I'm glad to be one....Hockey is Edmonton and lacrosse is a great sport on the side.

Similar to Frank, Forrest is also a fan of both the Rush as well as the Oilers.

Forrest has stated earlier in this chapter that he is a fan of the Rush because he likes to support Edmonton sports and enjoys being a part of the Rush since the beginning. He demonstrated this type of socialization aspect as a patriotic fan of the Oilers as well,

Hockey has been well-known in Edmonton for a lot longer, so it's become more a part of our daily lives. Growing up hearing about the team, lately an underdog (or a failure) in a long-running league gives the team and the city a lot of history. For those of us who were around for the Oilers Dynasty, the team is also a point of pride and a measure of potential.

The lacrosse versus hockey theme was also revealed in the telephone interview with the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, as well as in a newspaper article collected by the researcher. The Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions mentioned that the organization does realize it is in a hockey market but has seen the fan base become quite apathetic toward the two hockey teams in the 2009-2010 season, as both the Oilers and Oil Kings did not make the playoffs. The Director of Marketing and Promotions went on to say,

It is definitely a good opportunity for us to come in and say, "you know here's this. Here's something you can take a look at right now. Here's an alternative."

And people have started to notice us a little bit. And we've definitely got a lot of positive feedback in those regards.

As demonstrated by the Rush fans as well as the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, the lacrosse versus hockey theme, whether it be positive or negative, has an impact on the reasons why fans attend and could be helpful to attract future nonfans. This theme was also prevalent in a newspaper article discovered by the researcher,

Lacrosse often stands in the shadow of almost every other pro sport and might seem a sorry spring substitute for the good old hockey game. Indeed, few fans of the Flames, Oilers or Leafs would even notice the NLL playoffs if their teams were contending for the Stanley Cup.

But there's plenty of common ground between Canada's two official sports.

"A lot of hockey people are lacrosse people," said Edmonton Rush coach Derek Keenan. "It's really a natural transition."

Most Canadian lacrosse players spent the winters of their youth at the hockey rink. NHLers such as Wayne Gretzky, Brendan Shanahan and Joe Nieuwendyk all played lacrosse before realizing which sport was the true meal ticket. New York Islanders rookie John Tavares credits lacrosse as key to his development as a hockey player. Tavares's uncle (also named John) is the NLL's all-time scoring leader (Lupton, 2010, ¶ 5-9).

The lacrosse versus hockey theme along with its relevance to a person's motivation, attitude, learning and perception and his/her stage in his/her life or family cycle (Mullin et al., 2007) is helpful in explaining the reasons why fans of the Rush attend Rush games.

Marketing Approaches

Throughout the online focus group many marketing considerations were revealed from both the nonfans as well as the fans. A definition of sport marketing was given briefly in the introduction of this study; however, in order to fully understand and discuss this section, a more detailed version of the definition will be provided here. According to Mullin et al. (2007),

Sport marketing consists of all activities designed to meet the needs and wants of sport consumers through exchange processes. Sport marketing has developed two major thrusts: the marketing of sport products and services directly to consumers of sport, and the marketing of other consumer and industrial products or services through the use of sport promotions (p. 11).

The literature as well as the findings in this study revealed numerous reasons why fans or even nonfans choose to be a fan or attend certain sport events. In the literature, some of the reasons why fans attend certain sport events are because of economics, demographics, game attractiveness, residual preferences (Armstrong, 2008; Ferreira & Armstrong, 2004; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Zhang et al., 1995), entertainment factors (Funk & Pastore, 2000), or even for the wholesome exciting environment (Funk et al., 2004). This study revealed some similarities to previous conducted research. For instance, some Rush fan participants attend Rush games to identify as an Edmontonian sport fan, which was similar to Wann et al. (2008) who found group affiliation to be a motivator for sport fans to attend aggressive sport events. Although these are all factors that help to explain why nonfans or fans do not attend or attend sport events, very few studies mention marketing approaches as contributing factors. Marketing approaches

inductively emerged as a rationale for nonfans to not attend Rush games and for fans to attend Rush games. There were five sub-themes that materialized from this major theme and each one will be discussed throughout the rest of this section.

Promotion and Awareness

Promotion and awareness were categorized together because a majority of the participants felt that two of the reasons why nonfans are not attending Rush games are due to minimal promotion and not knowing enough about the sport of lacrosse or the Rush. This lack of awareness and knowledge further hinders the Rush in attracting nonfans because according to the participants the Rush are not promoting the sport and game or educating potential fans well enough for nonfans to want to attend. This is a significant problem because according to Milne and McDonald (1999); Sloan (1989), Wann (1995); Zhang, Lam, Connoughton, Bennett, Pease, Pham, Killion, Ocker, and Duley (2004) as cited in Armstrong (2008) "Promotions consistently found to be positively related to game attendance" (p. 219). Furthermore, as lacrosse is not as well known as some other sports such as hockey, baseball or basketball, education about the sport is an important component to attract nonfans. For instance, of the six nonfan participants, four of them mentioned that one of the reasons they did not attend is because they are unaware of the game of lacrosse. Norm specifically says that he went to a game once but found it extremely confusing and probably would not go back. Similarly Nancy stated that she has not been to a game due to not knowing the rules of the sport. Ned said that he just does not know lacrosse as well as hockey and this contributed to him not attending a game. This was also a reason why Natalie did not attend Rush games.

Correspondingly to the nonfan participants, all four of the Rush fan participants

stated that other people do not attend because of the lack of understanding of the game of lacrosse. Finn stated, "I have never missed a game and I do not get angry when people say they would not attend a game. If you don't know the game and there is no education or explanations then why would you?" Fred agreed with Finn when he said, "I have found that lacrosse is an exotic sport to some like cricket and rugby... they have seen pictures of it but have no clue." Frank and Forrest both mentioned that the game of lacrosse is complicated and not very straightforward. Frank further went on to say, "...a lot of people don't know the sport, and that uncertainty is probably the reason they don't go."

Moreover, of the ten participants, eight stated that there is a lack of promotion and awareness regarding the Rush and lacrosse for people to want to go. For instance, Norm states,

The Rush needs to find a way to get nonfans to understand its sport somehow. I am not going to spend my time watching a sport that I have no understanding of what's going on. Since this is best done at schools, the ship has sailed on many people. All the sports I follow I played in school and was taught the rules and strategies.

Norm's statement corresponds with Mullin et al. (2007) who mentioned that there is no better promoter than physical education teachers offering millions of kids lessons in a wide array of sports and activities. Nancy agreed with Norm and mentioned that it is all about promotion and that schools are a great place to target. Natalie stated that promotion would help the Rush attract more fans and if it was given some more publicity, nonfans may become interested in going to a Rush game. Forrest suggested that lacrosse is a great

sport but that the Rush needs to take one more extra step to make people aware of how great it actually is. Frank agreed with Forrest; he felt that people were not aware and the Rush needed to promote its product better to make people more aware of it. Through promotion and awareness, the Rush could attract people to the franchise as well as the sport of lacrosse, which in the end, could contribute to moving people on and up the FE or the PCM.

Non-traditional Techniques

According to Godin (2002), marketing has evolved through three ages; before advertising, during advertising, and after advertising. As stated by Godin (2002), marketing currently is in the after age of advertising. The after age of advertising is on the rise due to the fact that consumers in the past have been flooded with different types of marketing campaigns (i.e., commercials and advertisements everywhere). This has made consumers very resistant to traditional marketing strategies to the point where there is so much clutter, that consumers are practically avoiding advertisements all together (Godin, 2002). In the after age of advertising, innovation, advanced technology and word of mouth can spread to more networks than ever before (Godin, 2002). Throughout the online focus group and the phone interview, it was discovered that the Rush has attempted non-traditional marketing strategies but has yet to go above and beyond the expectations of what some nonfans are looking for to interest them in attending a game. Further, many of the participants have suggested contemporary marketing strategies that would encourage them to go catch a game.

As stated by the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions,

We definitely made more of an aggressive push this year to get into more of the

non-traditional stuff to get into the internet, the social networking. We've gone and we've tried more non-traditional stuff like getting on to the street, blitzing with flyers, showing up at events unannounced with our mascots and just dropping off prizes and stuff like that. We really have to, more so than other organizations in town, we have to get our name out there because we are relatively a new organization, a new sport and we aren't at top of mind like some of the other teams in town so we have to work a little bit harder at getting our name out there.

Four participants of the study have recognized the Rush's non-traditional marketing techniques, which have either sparked a bit of interest or have encouraged them to become fans of the Rush. Nancy mentioned,

The most intriguing part of the Rush for me is that they have a sponsorship deal with Randy Couture- my husband is a pro [Mixed Martial Arts] MMA fighter and when we heard about that we actually thought about attending a Rush game, we just haven't got around to it yet.

Another nonfan also made a comment about the different strategies implemented, Natalie stated, "I have been to Rexall for all three teams. I thought the Rush had a good idea behind having music playing the whole time during the game but in hockey that doesn't happen."

Similar to the responses of the two nonfan participants, Fred and Finn have also noticed the attempt of the Rush to differentiate itself in this competitive sport market, Finn said,

The other two "new" teams are trying to establish a fan base and will offer the fans, besides the game, a lot more in the way of celeb guests, contests and give-

aways. This makes the fans of the new teams appreciated for their attendance, at least I do.

Fred also mentioned, "I have attended every Rush game but one since they came to town. Like the comments about the Drillers, the Rush have tried many promotions, personalities, and activities to bring excitement to the venue."

The Rush' Director of Marketing and Promotions further commented on its attempt to be different in the market,

There's been a couple different things you know we've always tried to market ourselves as a little edgier, the sport is definitely a little more, I don't want to say violent, I know I did before but it definitely is more rugged and more aggressive. I think people do enjoy that. You know we have music going on throughout game play and I know at first some people were scratching their heads over it because traditionally that is just not something done in this market. They don't do it in hockey and if they don't do it in hockey it's unusual. We do music during game play. We also do a lot of in game promotions. Every time there is a break in play we have something going on. It could be a game, it could be a contest, our dance team will have t-shirts thrown into the crowd, its basically from the time we start from the time we finish we are trying to jam pack that as much as possible...Our owner is a big risk taker. He likes going out there and getting the big things that are noticed. We've had a monster truck that we've used as part of our promotions and we've had it painted up in the team colours. You know we've had some other vehicles that we've used in that way. And ya, he's very aggressive in that way and I think that is sort of what you need to do in this market just to get noticed just to

get out there.

Although the Rush is attempting non-traditional marketing strategies, the organization is still not doing enough to attract more fans and fill the seats in Rexall Place. Some participants have recognized this attempt to try and be different but the Rush could do more in terms of non-traditional marketing techniques to attract more nonfans to games. Nancy suggested,

Cross advertise- as I mentioned in another post, the most intriguing promo I have seen for the Rush was the sponsorship deal with Randy Couture- play that up-promote at MMA events- there is at least one a month in Edmonton.

I think the Rush really needs to start thinking outside of the box- think of great promotions, fun strategies to get people out to games and then have fun while they are there.

Finn also suggested a creative marketing technique that is not only contemporary but could also help educate individuals about the sport of lacrosse,

Using its practice facilities, in Leduc, have an information evening. The boardroom there has the setting for watching videos of past games with team members explaining what is taking place. They will also answer questions about the sport from the fans. Next, the group takes to the rink for a demo on shooting and passing and maybe a short scrimmage.

Frank suggested something similar to Finn. He also thinks that there should be live practices that can be watched by individuals, which would also help with the education of the sport. Ned also mentioned an “outside of the box” marketing strategy for the Rush to implement,

Promotion, promotion, promotion. It has to get the name of the Rush and the game of lacrosse more out there. Things like fan rallies will really start to get people more involved (especially if they can develop a catering to a younger crowd that will bring in a newer generation of fans).

Fred suggested an interesting non-traditional strategy which could not only be helpful for the Rush but the game of lacrosse in general. He believed that there is a relationship to be made between the NLL as well as the Major Lacrosse League (MLL). The MLL is played during the summer as it is field lacrosse and does not conflict with the NLL season. Also, some players even play in both leagues. If the two can work together maybe it would help with not only the promotion of the Rush, but also the promotion of both leagues and the sport of lacrosse. As mentioned previously by Mullin et al. (2007), the behaviour of sport firms has significant ramifications for consumer involvement. The non-traditional marketing sub-theme is also consistent with Godin (2002). He mentions that products and marketing have to be remarkable- worth noticing, create hype, be new and interesting- otherwise the products and marketing will be invisible. According to Godin (2002), marketing techniques in today's era need to be innovative. The suggestions of these participants demonstrated that although the Rush are attempting non-traditional marketing techniques and is trying to differentiate from its competition to attract fans, the organization needs to go one step further and implement innovative marketing techniques.

Traditional Strategies

As mentioned earlier, Godin (2002) stated that there are three ages of marketing. Traditional marketing strategies began in the advertising age; this was an age where

consumers began to be bombarded with advertising and marketing campaigns everywhere. In this marketing age, television commercials and mass media advertising were exercised (Godin, 2002). Marketing contributors began to create traditional marketing strategies such as the marketing mix, which includes the five P's and the FE. As mentioned by the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, the Rush does exercise traditional strategies like the use of media such as print, television and radio but a few specific traditional strategies came up throughout the online focus group which included: ticket packages, focusing on the target market and the use of the website. Ticket packages were mentioned by a number of the participants who suggested to attract nonfans, ticket packages should be utilized. According to Snipes and Ingram (2007) admission price is one of the most important motivators of fan attendance, particularly when trying to attract new fans. Of the ten participants in this study, five of them mentioned that ticket packages would be a good idea to get new fans to start attending games. Nathaniel mentioned,

If I were trying to fill the seats to Rush games, I'd have a huge draw/promo that gives sports fans (maybe at an Oiler game) free upcoming tickets to the next Calgary vs. Edmonton home game for exposure and to fuel the natural rivalry.

Short term pain for long term gain.

Similarly, Ned indicated that he would be more inclined to attend a game if he were to get ticket packages. He stated,

I'm not sure what they do for giveaways, but cheap tickets to the lacrosse leagues across Edmonton would be a nice way to bring some people in as well.

If they were to offer packages at the current \$50-\$70 rate I would be more willing

to go. In that price you could get free parking, 2 beers, pizza and some snacks or something I would be much more inclined to attend. \$80 for a decent night out package would be about the same as the price for an Oilers game ticket (Why yes, I do sit in the cheap seats) plus all the goodies I would probably go to more lacrosse games than Oilers games.

Nancy and Frank also agreed the Rush should give away free or packaged tickets to entice newcomers to attend.

Forrest, on the other hand, does think that ticket promotions are a good idea. However he is a season ticket holder and mentioned, "Ticket promotions are great, but they tend to make me feel a little silly paying season ticket prices when I could just take advantage of all these ticket giveaways and promotions." This is a valid point and is consistent with the findings of Zhang et al. (1995) who stated that season ticket holders want to be treated well and have good seats, whereas single ticket holders want discounts and giveaways. This debate on ticket promotions also corresponds with Mullin et al. (2007), who mentioned that there is no simple answer to ticket discount pricing. While some believe that ticket discounts will cheapen the overall product value, especially season ticket holders, others regarded them as an important tool to move fans on and up the escalator (Mullin et al., 2007). For instance Sutton et al. (1997), stated that within the 'Big Four' major sport leagues there is price insensitivity, as the prices go up fans are still willing to attend. In contrast, a study conducted by Boyd and Krehbiel (2003), they found that discount tickets might be underutilized as two teams involved in the study had a positive outcome from the use of discounted tickets. Therefore, discounted tickets may depend on the target market the franchise is trying to reach. This could be the reason why

the Rush do not do many ticket package promotions because in the telephone interview, the Director of Marketing and Promotions stated that the Rush want to please its season ticket holders,

Well, I think right now we have a pretty strong season ticket base and you know the first thing we want to make sure is that we keep those people happy. They have been very loyal and, like I said before, we didn't have the greatest on field success for the first couple of years but the same people have been sticking around and part of it is we want to make sure we are keeping them happy. We do hold a lot of fan forums with our season ticket holders and ask them to get their feedback, what they do and they don't like, what they like to see changed. We have our own separate phone number for our season ticket holders so if they feel like if there is a concern or anything they can call and its directed to one of our executives who can deal with them directly. You know they don't have to worry about having to wait or anything. Our guys do work very hard for our season ticket holders to make sure that you know their concerns are met and we do a lot of things in that way. In regard to attracting the nonfan that is always a bit of a challenge. Because a lot of people unfortunately are very hockey or nothing type thing. I think that will always be a challenge until we can really put the best team possible on the floor. You know people will come and check us out casually but you know when we weren't doing well on the floor it made it a little harder.

This statement by the Director of Marketing and Promotions demonstrated possible reasons why the Rush has not exercised the ticket package strategy: it wants to please its season ticket holders. However, according to Mullin et al. (2007), this could be

problematic for a franchise that is in a mid-level professional sport league because its focus should not only be on satisfying season ticket holders but also on attracting new fans.

The focus of the Rush's target market is another aspect of the Rush's marketing techniques that was mentioned, and again, seemed to be questioned by some of the participants of this study. Forrest, Norm and Fred noted that the Rush tends to market to families, which is not a bad marketing technique as long as it is done properly. However, Norm did mention the family-oriented target market did make him feel uncomfortable at the game when he wanted to have a good time. Forrest made an interesting point in regards to the Rush's decision to target to families,

Right now, these lesser-known teams are catering more to the family market and wholesome family entertainment, while perfectly enjoyable, is also safe and harmless and therefore seen as not as exciting as games like hockey. Lacrosse sees just as many fights as hockey, the checking is really aggressive and goals just as spectacular, so why is the Rush being marketed to families? And all the while still trying to make the team seem edgy and cool?

This comment made by Forrest demonstrated that the Rush is still trying to find who it wants to target, which is also demonstrated by some of the non-traditional techniques such as having monster trucks at the games or having a cross-promotional agreement with Randy Couture, MMA fighter.

The last marketing technique that was discussed by three of the Rush fan participants was how the Rush utilizes its website. According to Forrest, "The website is a great advertising venue, but it's full of ads for people to buy tickets and not about stuff

they actually want to see: player profiles, team stats, articles about the team and the game.” Moreover, Frank mentioned how fans cannot even download wallpaper to their own computers. Fred further commented and said, “They used to have about 10 different images you could download, but when they revamped the site that went away. They also used to have clips from recent game action that you could look at.” Although the utilization of the website may seem like a small part of the Rush’s marketing strategies it is still a piece of the puzzle to assist with attracting new fans and satisfying current fans. The different traditional marketing techniques as well as the differences in opinions by all the participants demonstrates how complex a sport marketing plan can be.

Media Exposure

Media exposure was another marketing strategy that seemed to be something the Rush needs to develop in order to attract nonfans as well as move its current fans up the FE and PCM. Through the document collection of articles it was found that the Rush, along with the NLL, are in desperate need of a television deal. According to Mullin et al. (2007), television is helpful in the vast distribution of the product and can help enlarge the consumer base. However, because the Rush does not have a television deal, it is difficult to reach a larger consumer base. This is recognized by both the league as well as its fans and nonfans. As mentioned previously, the 2010 season was the best season, in terms of on floor success, the Rush has experienced. However, not one of the Rush’s regular season games or playoff games was televised. In an article written in the *Edmonton Journal* in May, 2010 it mentioned,

There are other ways to improve the team's bottom line and television is first and foremost among them.

"We're really close to a (league) TV deal," Urban said. "I think we'll have a TV deal next year."

International Management Group is negotiating a TV package on the league's behalf and Urban believes there is a good chance more than half of his team's 16 games will be broadcast next season. He may also partner with the Calgary Roughnecks and Toronto Rock on regional broadcasts to fill in whatever holes are left in the national schedule.

Because the Rush weren't seen on TV in the playoffs, only on the Internet, Urban knows the value of that short run will have been minimized and he vowed to seek changes.

"A playoff game on the road is valuable for the organization because it shows we're a team headed in the right direction. The value to the average Edmonton sports fan who hasn't been exposed to lacrosse, there is some value. We got some coverage in the last couple of weeks. But when you're not able to watch us on TV, I think that hurts. That's something that will be discussed" (Barnes, 2010, ¶13-17).

Over half of the participants of this study also mentioned that a television deal or any media deal would be helpful. Fred mentioned,

The NLL needs to work on a TV deal. Unfortunately, with A-Channel and Access channel going away and CBC, CTV and Global moving to regional rather than local programming, the options for us are slim....This year TSN is covering the Toronto Rock home games. Shaw carried a few games in season 2, I believe. The NLL had a deal with an Internet company (B2 I believe). That was a total waste of time; the feed was terrible and the announcers were boring.

Nancy agreed,

I also agree that a stronger TV presence is necessary. Playing games would be great but even just getting highlights on SportCentre or SportsNet is a start. If I saw the occasional highlight loop from lacrosse I would consider going.

Finn felt that perhaps a commercial would be beneficial,

I will always be a fan of this sport and hope to someday see an action TV commercial. I really believe that this game cannot be described in words; it is a visual sport and must be shown in this format.

Not only did the fans and nonfans of the study feel a television deal was important, but also any type of media commitment would benefit the Rush. Natalie not only agreed that the Rush needed to be seen on television, but she felt they also need to be in the newspaper and local media more. Forrest believed similarly in regards to the media and the Rush. He stated, "I'd love to hear them on the radio or see them in the local paper when they have a big home win. Heck, a cover story now and again would make the team a lot more noticeable." Frank thought that if the Rush could get more media to cover it, "the more the fans will realize we got a great team in the City of Champions that can actually win games."

As mentioned previously by Fred as well as the Director of Marketing and Promotions, the media coverage has improved but is still struggling, which has been demonstrated by the comments made by the participants. However, the television and media deal can be seen as a double edged sword because if the Rush is not popular enough, the media will not want to cover it. At the same time, the Rush cannot expose itself and the sport of lacrosse without the help of the media.

League Structure

The league structure was another topic that came up during the online focus group, the telephone interview, as well as the document collection of articles. There are a few points one must understand before going into the discussion of league structure. First, almost all NLL players have other full time careers outside of lacrosse and many do not reside in the cities that they play for. Therefore, the players are flown in for practices and games. Due to this, many teams only practice once a week (usually on a Thursday or Friday) and then play their games on the weekend. In the case of the Rush, all of its games were on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday (NLL, 2010). Not one game was mid-week. Furthermore, each team only plays sixteen games, of which, only eight are played at home. Lastly, if a team makes it to the playoffs, it is possible that it may not even get a playoff game at home. This happened to the Rush during the 2010 season.

In the literature it has been discovered that game schedule for teams can impact attendance. According to Snipes and Ingram (2007) as well as Zhang et al. (1995) the schedule can be a top motivator for sport event attendance. The Director of Marketing and Promotions was aware that the way the league has designed the schedule, as well as the number of games played, is a challenge, but the organization is trying its best to make the most of it,

I mean we have to be careful of where and when we do stuff because at the end of the day we still know that hockey is still number one and probably will be for a bit so you know we have to be very strategic with how and where and when we approach doing these things...we only have the eight dates so we try to treat them more like events if anything.

The participants that mentioned the inconvenience of the league structure were three of the four Rush fans. Although they do attend games they mentioned that it is problematic only having eight home games and the fact that they are only on weekends. They also think the schedule and league structure could contribute to the decisions why some people do not attend. Frank mentioned his complaint he has with the Rush and league structure,

I believe the team will continue to bring in new fans, but nowhere near the amount the Edmonton Oilers get. Kind of hard to do when you're a weekend team only...If they realized what the sport offers and even how close it can be to hockey (hockey with balls), then maybe more people would come out. But that, again is another gripe I have with the NLL - the sport should be more than just a weekend league and have more teams. If they get out there more, play more, maybe more fans will come out.

Similar to Frank, Forrest added,

The NLL season is pretty short, with games happening only on the weekend, when folks already have stuff to do. People aren't going to want to give up part of their weekend for such a low-profile activity. I love it, but other folks may not.

Fred also stated, "Eight home games a year is a very short season, which is a double edge blade as it gives one less time to generate buzz, but keeps season ticket prices low."

Another issue that was discovered during the data collection process was the fact that the Rush made the playoffs but never hosted a playoff game. This did not come up in the online focus group as the focus group ended before the regular season was complete. However, in the *Edmonton Journal* on May, 2010 an article stated,

A possible change to the playoff format is on the agenda for a June board of governors meeting.

"I think the playoff format needs to be changed so everybody who makes the playoffs gets a home playoff game," said Urban. "Maybe it's a best-of-three in the first two rounds and if you still want a one-game, winner-take-all final you can do that. I think many teams are in favour of changing the format. Right now you can be in the playoffs and your home fans may never see you (Barnes, 2010, ¶16-19).

Although it has been recognized by the Rush as well as its fans that the league structure is an issue, due to the lack of popularity of the sport, the league changing the structure is more challenging. The weekend game schedule probably will not change until the players can play lacrosse as a full time job. However, this will not happen until the popularity of the sport flourishes. Moreover, the league cannot expand if the NLL does not increase the fan base as well as the interest. Changing the playoff format is a step in the right direction, yet (like it has been said) it is a double edged sword; the league needs more fans in order to change the league structure but the current structure of the league may discourage some people from attending.

Major Themes Summary

The online focus group, telephone interview, document collection, as well as the demographic questionnaire assisted in answering the primary and secondary research questions: 1) why do fans of the Rush choose to attend Rush games?, and 2) why do nonfans of the Rush choose not to attend Rush games? The ten Rush nonfan and fan participants shared their personal opinions and experiences which allowed three major themes along with sub-themes to inductively emerge. The nonfans of the Rush do not

attend Rush games because of the connection they have with hockey and the disconnection they have with lacrosse, some are simply not interested or were not entertained, as well as the lack of exposure the Rush receive. The Rush fan participants attend Rush games because of Edmonton community pride, the entertainment value they get out of attending a game, it is a great alternative new sport experience and it either is a substitute or a complement to hockey. Both the nonfan and fan participants of this study suggested that different marketing approaches could be utilized in order to attract nonfans to attend games.

Opportunities and Challenges of an Online Focus Group

Not only did the researcher want to understand why nonfans and fans choose not to attend or attend Edmonton Rush games but also wanted to address a gap in the knowledge regarding online research gathering tools. As mentioned previously, there are many opportunities and challenges when using the online techniques to collect data. For this study similar opportunities and challenges that were mentioned in the literature review were found. For instance the researcher was able to recruit participants regardless of their location (Burton & Bruening, 2003; Davis et al., 2004; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kitto & Barnett, 2007; O'Connor & Madge, 2003). The researcher also found that online group dynamics were weak (Burton & Bruening, 2003; Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kvale & Brinkman, 2008) and rapport was difficult to develop (Folkman Curasi, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; O'Connor & Madge, 2003). One of the main challenges the researcher had, which was not mentioned by other contributors was in the recruitment stage of the study. People were reluctant to trust the researcher in the online chat rooms as the researcher only entered the chat room twelve days prior to starting the online focus

group. If this study were to be completed again, the researcher would enter the online forums a couple months before to develop a rapport. It was also found that having a specific online focus group site that was specific to the study was advantageous. Overall, the researcher found the online focus group experience to be a positive one. However, it must be noted that the researcher of this study has never completed a face-to-face focus group, so making comparisons to the traditional research method was difficult.

The positive experience that the researcher had using an online focus group to collect data made it apparent that sport marketing practitioners and academics are not utilizing this research gathering technique to its full potential. Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009); Foster and Hyatt (2008), as well as Kerr and Gladden (2008) addressed similar types of fans in their research: distant fans (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2008; Foster & Hyatt, 2008) and satellite fans (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). Distant and satellite fans are similar because they are fans of their favourite team regardless of geographic location due to the rise of communication technology (Kerr and Gladden, 2008). According to Kerr and Gladden (2008), due to the advancement in technologies, fans now have the ability to access their favourite teams and players regardless of geographic location. Similarly, Foster and Hyatt (2008) mentioned that teams should be creating strategies that consider the distant loyal fan. These authors provide perfect examples as to why sport marketers should be using online research gathering techniques to get in touch with their distant or satellite fans. The more these fans are understood, the better the marketing strategies that can be implemented. Not only can online research gathering tools help with addressing the distant fan, but the researcher of this study also found it beneficial to interact with nonfans. Joining an online focus group compared to a face-to-face focus group, is a little

more convenient and possibly requires less time commitment for participants. This gives the nonfans more incentive to participate. As fans become more complex, sport marketers need to find the best strategies possible to reach each different type of fan and online research gathering techniques can be advantageous for sport marketing practitioners and academics.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was first to understand why nonfans decide not to attend Rush games and second why fans decide to attend Rush games. This was guided by the Frequency Escalator (FE) and Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) to help understand how to get nonfans on the FE and PCM or to move current fans up the FE and PCM. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to address the gap in knowledge regarding the use of online research gathering tools to sport marketing. A summary of the research, along with sport marketing implications and recommendations for future studies are presented next. Finally, the researcher's reflexivity regarding the study and limitations/delimitations in concluding the research are reported.

Summary of Research

The 2010 NLL season marked its twenty-third year as a league. However the league as a whole has struggled to increase attendance at games. The Edmonton Rush specifically, compared to their fellow Canadian franchises, has found it challenging to attract new fans to attend games. An online focus group along with a telephone interview, document collection and a brief demographic questionnaire were used to collect data. The combination of these methods, the use of the analysis techniques of meaning coding, condensation, and interpretation and with the researcher's interpretive approach to this study, allowed for three major themes to inductively emerge. For the online focus group, the researcher started with eleven participants however one left the group less than half way through. In the end, there were ten subjects in total, where four were fans and six were nonfans. Furthermore, there was one participant for the telephone interview-the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions. The contributions made by all of the

participants assisted the three major themes to inductively emerge.

The primary theme answered research question number one: Why do nonfans decide not to attend Rush games? The FE and PCM were used as a guide when analyzing the data. However, as the researcher was analyzing the data, the data seemed to fit the consumer behaviour in sport model developed by Mullin et al. (2007). As mentioned by Mullin et al. (2007), this model is used to “remind marketers of all the factors that one must sift through to understand and develop consumer interest, involvement and commitment” (p. 71). As studying the nonfan is fairly new to the sport marketing literature, it was difficult to relate findings to previous studies but nonetheless three sub-themes emerged.

The first sub-theme that emerged was labelled: the hockey connection versus the lacrosse disconnection. Five of the six nonfan participants mentioned they have a connection with hockey and did not feel the same way towards lacrosse, which hinders their attendance at Rush games. This paralleled what Mullin et al. (2007) mentioned as environmental factors influencing consumer behaviour. The disconnect was not so much with the Rush but with the sport of lacrosse. This is beneficial to understand for the Rush as well as the NLL. However, it may not be relevant to other mid-level professional leagues like the MLS because potential MLS fans most likely do not need to learn about soccer due to its popularity. Yet, it may be valuable to mid-level professional leagues like Major League Lacrosse (MLL) whose average attendance in 2010 was 5,337 (Pointstreak, 2010) or the WNBA whose average attendance in 2010 was 7,800, because potential fans may need to further their understanding on field lacrosse or connect themselves with women’s basketball. The second sub-theme categorized as: no interest

and/or lack of entertainment. Two of the nonfans attended a Rush game but it did not interest them enough to ever want to go back. In addition, three more nonfans did not have a desire to attend as they are not interested or were concerned that they would not be entertained. The third sub-theme, labelled lack of exposure, was another reason why the nonfans do not attend Rush games. Although the Rush is attempting to expose its product as best it can, the organization still cannot catch the eyes of these nonfans. As stated previously, individual influences such as learning, motivation, perception and attitude contribute to consumer behaviour in sport (Mullin et al., 2007).

The telephone interview as well as document collection revealed an interesting observation. However, this observation was never actually discussed in the online focus group. It was observed that the Rush owner as well as the Director of Marketing and Promotions kept mentioning that poor performance was a contributing factor to poor attendance, yet when the participants were asked, “why they chose to or not to attend Rush games,” not one nonfan mentioned performance as a factor. Another interesting observation was that the Rush were having their most successful season in franchise history; however, its attendance was at an all-time low.

The second theme answered the secondary research question: Why do fans choose to attend Rush games? From this question, four themes emerged and were labelled as: Edmonton community pride, the entertainment value, great new alternative sport experience, as well as lacrosse versus hockey. Of the four Rush fan subjects, three of them went to games because of the Edmonton community pride and even one nonfan participant said he would consider going just to support an Edmonton team. This finding was consistent with Funk et al. (2004), Kolbe and James (2000), Koo and Hardin (2008),

Mullin et al. (2007), Snipes & Ingram, (2007), Sutton et al. (1997), Trail et al. (2003), and Wann et al. (1996) who said that community is a strong motivator for fans to attend sport events.

It was also found that three of the Rush fan participants thought there was more entertainment value when attending a Rush game compared to an Oilers or Oil Kings game. Yet, one nonfan found that the price of a ticket to a Rush game, which he knew very little about, was a constraint. This discovery was slightly different than what was mentioned in the literature, as it mostly examined the financial cost rather than the value. Nonetheless, the differences in opinions appeared to be relevant to the literature. For instance, Hansen and Gauthier (1989) and Zhang et al. (1995) revealed there was a negative effect on attendance when financial cost was considered while Sutton et al. (1997) and Trail et al. (2008) did not find financial cost to be an issue when deciding to attend a sport event.

According to Funk and Pastore (2000), direct experience is an attitude measure that was an effective predictor of fan loyalty. Furthermore, as mentioned by Kolbe and James (2003), the experience at an event (game) may be more important to some people than the actual team. These discoveries were comparable to the findings of the Rush fan participants. All four of the Rush fan participants felt that the Rush was a great new sport experience and this was demonstrated through their socialization, involvement and commitment (Mullin et al., 2007) towards the Rush.

Lastly, all four of the Rush fans became fans either because they needed something different than hockey or wanted a complement to hockey. The two older and married Rush fan participants had been turned off by the Oilers organization as well as

hockey and have taken up Rush games as an alternative. Forrest and Frank, who were younger and single, enjoyed both Oilers and Rush games and appreciated the differences the two organizations have. These findings correlated with the individual influences of consumer behaviour in sport presented by Mullin et al. (2007) such as perceptions, learning, motivation and attitudes.

The final theme that emerged was marketing approaches. It was found that if the Rush implemented some different marketing strategies this could assist with attracting the nonfan. Promotion and awareness was the first categorized sub-theme. There is a lack of awareness for the sport of lacrosse which contributes to nonfans not attending games. The Rush is not promoting its product well enough to motivate nonfans to attend a Rush game. This was supported in a study conducted by Armstrong (2008), which stated promotion is positively related to game attendance. Furthermore, over half of all the participants mentioned that uncertainty about the game of lacrosse can be an attributing factor to nonfans deciding to not attend Rush games.

Non-traditional marketing techniques was the second labelled sub-theme to arise. Although the Director of Marketing and Promotions stated that the Rush had attempted non-traditional marketing strategies, the participants of this study indicated that more needs to be done if the Rush wants to attract more fans. According to Godin (2002), society is in an era that requires more innovation than ever before in marketing plans.

Traditional marketing strategies also emerged as a labelled sub-theme, specifically focusing on ticket packages, the Rush's target market and the use of the Rush website. Of the ten participants, half of them mentioned that ticket packages would be a good idea to attract nonfans. However, as mentioned in the telephone interview, the Rush cater to its

season ticket holders, therefore having ticket package promotions would not cater to them. This finding conflicted with the literature because, as Mullin et al. (2007) mentioned, mid-level professional sport leagues should be catering to the nonfan and not specifically focusing on the season ticket holder. According to Boyd and Krehbiel (2003), if ticket packages are used appropriately there could be benefits to the organization. Further, a few participants mentioned that the Rush tried to target families. Yet, it seems unclear as to who the Rush is actually trying to reach as its target market. For instance, the game of lacrosse is aggressive and fighting can be used as a tactical strategy so having a cross-sponsorship deal with a MMA fighter does make sense. The cross-sponsorship deal with a MMA fighter along with the attributes of lacrosse are more for an adult audience. Yet, in contrast, the Rush has brought in monster trucks for the kids and it markets itself as edgy and cool, which could also be an attraction to children or even adults. These factors make the Rush's target market very unfocused. Lastly, three Rush fans mentioned that the website could be better utilized to satisfy the current fan (e.g., player stats, highlights, and so on) and possibly inform potential fans if it were more user friendly.

Television and media deals was another categorized sub-theme that arose. According to the Rush owner, the league and the Rush are trying to negotiate a television deal because they realize it hinders their ability for mass exposure. A majority of the participants recognized this as well and some nonfans even stated that if they saw more of the Rush on television or in the local media they would be more inclined to check out a game.

Finally, the structure of the league was the last sub-theme label to emerge.

According to Snipes and Ingram (2007) as well as Zhang et al. (1995), the schedule can be a top motivator for sport event attendance. Many of the participants mentioned that due to the Rush having only weekend games they suggested that some people would choose not to attend. It was also stated by a few participants that the league needs to expand to create more teams and, in the end, more games. However, as discussed, the league can only expand and have weekday games if there is demand for their product. The Rush owner did mention in an article (Barnes, 2010) that he hopes there will be changes to the playoff schedule so those teams who make the playoffs will be guaranteed at least one home playoff game. The Rush had its best season yet but were unable to play at home because of the playoff format.

These findings from the data analysis will allow the researcher to provide sport marketing implications and recommendations in the following section so the Rush organization, the NLL and perhaps other mid-level professional sport leagues can get fans on and moving up the FE and PCM.

Sport Marketing Implications and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, there are interesting implications and recommendations for sport marketers. For a chart of the implications and recommendations please refer to Appendix M. This section will first discuss the utilization of online research gathering tools and then move on to specific sport marketing strategies for the Rush, NLL, other mid-level professional leagues, as well as sport marketing practitioners and academics.

In regards to online research gathering tools, this is a technique that is underutilized by sport marketing practitioners as well as academics. Although the online focus group

did not produce as much data as the researcher would have hoped, similar to Kenny (2004), the researcher still found it to be a valuable research method for sport marketers to utilize when trying to understand nonfans. As mentioned in the literature review, online qualitative methods do have positive and negative attributes; however, so do face-to-face qualitative methods. According to Burton and Bruening (2003), combining technology and method is the present and the future of academia. If sport marketers utilize the online research gathering strategy, “sport scholars can advance knowledge in the unique aspects of sport and improve the conditions of people who both work in sport and are served by sport” (Burton & Bruening, 2003, p. 326). This, in turn, will assist with a better understanding of consumers as well as more strategic marketing plans.

Although this study only used an online focus group, many other strategies can be implemented, such as the use of Skype (real time video phone) for one-on-one interviews or even the use of online forums to engage in discussion. The researcher recommends that sport marketing practitioners and academics only use online research gathering tools if it fits with what they are trying to accomplish. For instance, an online research gathering technique would be useful to discover a satellite fan’s motivation and loyalties (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). Or online strategies may be helpful in developing marketing approaches that specifically focus on a team’s distant fans to strengthen its fan-team bond (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009). One major component to the online research gathering technique that the researcher of this study thinks is crucial for sport marketing practitioners as well as academics is engaging themselves within the online community before deciding upon the online research gathering tool (i.e., online focus group, online interviews, asynchronous, and synchronous). Understanding the online community first will only strengthen the data

collected.

The online focus group used for this study allowed the researcher to conduct research that normally would have been overlooked due to the geographic and financial constraint of flying to Edmonton and conducting a face-to-face focus group. Other than Burton and Bruening (2003) and this study no one else has made use of this type of data collection technique in sport. The researcher of this study discovered that the opportunities of online research techniques are endless and could essentially change the future of sport marketing. Sport marketing practitioners and academics need to recognize the endless possibilities that online data gathering tactics provide and incorporate them into their research or marketing plans.

Not only did this researcher discover the usefulness of online research gathering tools but the researcher also found many sport marketing specific approaches that can be implemented by the Rush, the NLL, as well as some mid-level professional sport leagues/teams. One of the major findings of this research project was the fact that according to the Rush's Director of Marketing and Promotions, the Rush tries to satisfy its season ticket holders and does not have a specific marketing strategy within their marketing plan to attract nonfans. Although the Rush do need to have a marketing strategy that targets their season ticket holder, not having a marketing strategy for nonfans within their overall marketing plan is an area of concern. It is problematic because, according to Mullin et al. (2007), although season ticket holders are important, a mid-level professional league team should not concentrate exclusively on season ticket holders. These leagues certainly need to be strategic in their marketing plan to entice nonfans onto the FE as well. Attendance numbers for the NLL, and the Rush in particular,

demonstrate that demand for professional lacrosse is low. As a result, the Rush should have a marketing strategy for their nonfans along with a separate marketing strategy for their season ticket holders. Directing all marketing energy to season ticket holders is acceptable when there is high demand (Mullin et al., 2007), but this is not the case for the Rush.

Therefore, with teams like the Rush, other NLL franchises, along with some mid-level professional sport leagues like the WNBA, not only should there be a focus on season ticket holders but there also needs to be a focus on the nonfan. For instance, for the 2010 WNBA season the league's average attendance was 7,800 per game (Wikipedia, 2010b). Furthermore some teams, like the Chicago Sky and Tulsa Shock are averaging below 5,000 spectators a game, yet many of these teams are playing in venues that seat over 17,000 people (Wikipedia, 2010b). Mid-level teams like the Chicago Sky and the Tulsa Shock are in definite need of new marketing strategies that include tactics to entice the nonfan or they might end up like NFL Europa and cease operations. Overall, sport marketers need to recognize the importance of the nonfan to specific organizations.

Utilizing the preseason games to entice the nonfan on the FE could be an effective strategy for the Rush. However, it must be noted that the preseason games are not usually held in Edmonton. Each team in the NLL will play approximately three to four preseason games. These exhibition games are used to promote the league and sport throughout North America. For example, one season the Rush played one of its exhibition games in Idaho, United States. Some preseason games are held in Alberta; for instance, in December 2009 the Rush and the Calgary Roughnecks played a preseason game in Lethbridge, which lies southeast of Calgary and is approximately a five hour drive from

Edmonton. Having the NLL's exhibition games in different locations may not be the best strategy for the league to implement. There is no way to follow the Rush besides live attendance, so there is no need to build a fan base in Idaho or Lethbridge because people are not likely going to drive all the way to Edmonton to see a game. Having a home exhibition game is a great way to expose nonfans to the Rush. If the Rush was to host a home exhibition game, the season ticket holders could get in for free, everyone else could get lower bowl seats for approximately \$20.00 and upper bowl seats could be around \$10.00. This is a great way to expose the product with little risk for the ticket buyer. This, in turn, could benefit the Rush when trying to attract nonfans in the Edmonton region.

The Buffalo Bills of the NFL, for example, have one of their preseason games as a kids' day festival. According to the Buffalo Bills (2010), it is a day that has exciting pregame activities and giveaways for children under 14. The Bills are targeting kids who might not otherwise see a live game; making them dream of the day they are adults and can purchase season tickets of their own. This experience as a child will presumably help move them on and up the FE. If the Rush had an exhibition game at Rexall Place, the team could do a similar promotion; maybe not a kids' day but a comparable idea. For instance, the exhibition game could be offered as a low-price ticket promotion (e.g., \$10.00 to \$20.00 a ticket). Moreover, the Rush could make use of its cross-promotional deal with Randy Couture and use him in some of the pregame activities (e.g., autographs and pictures). If the Rush requests to the league a home preseason game it could be a beneficial strategy to attract nonfans. Using a preseason game as a marketing strategy is not new to sport marketers but can be beneficial to the Rush and the NLL. It may also be a valuable marketing strategy for other mid-level professional leagues, such as the MLL,

who also struggle with attendance. Currently, the MLL's average attendance is 5,337 (Pointstreak, 2010), and four of their six teams are below 4,500 spectators a game. Specifically, the Chicago Machine are only averaging 2,364 spectators per game, so perhaps using preseason games to attract nonfans could be beneficial to not only Chicago but the whole MLL.

Ticket packages were also mentioned as an incentive to entice nonfans to a Rush game. Due to the Rush having more of a focus on season ticket holders, ticket packages are minimal because as mentioned by one of the participants, season ticket holders would probably much rather purchase the ticket packages than pay for season tickets. According to Snipes and Ingram (2007), admission price was one of the most important motivators for fan attendance, especially if the marketers are trying to attract new fans. Therefore, the Rush along with other NLL franchises and mid-level professional league teams need to develop ticket packages that would interest the nonfan to get them on and up the FE without upsetting the season ticket holder.

The Toronto Rock (the best Canadian franchise in terms of attendance) have two ticket promotion strategies that are appropriate to attract the nonfan but could arguably upset the season ticket holder. Its season ticket holders could be upset because those who purchase the ticket packages are getting a better deal than the season ticket holders. Nonetheless, the idea behind the ticket packages is the main point for this example. The first ticket promotion is the Rock Solid Mini Pack. According to the Toronto Rock (2010), "This is a 4 game pack designed to let you pick the games you want to see at one low cost. Pick 3 games of your choice, and you receive a free ticket to any Rock home game for the rest of the season. (if you buy 2 mini-packs, you get 2 seats, etc.)" (§ 1). The

other ticket promotion is called: Ten Ticket Flex Pack. “This option allows you to buy 10 tickets that can be used in any denomination for any regular season home game. For example, you can attend 2 games with 5 people, or 5 games with 2 people, and anything in between” (Toronto Rock, 2010, ¶ 2).

The Rush’s silver ticket section in Rexall Place is the medium price of all the sections and these tickets sell for \$46.50 (not including taxes) per seat. The best seats are in the gold section, which are \$66.50 (not including taxes) per seat and the least expensive seats are in the Safeway section, which are \$20.00 (not including taxes) per game. Using the silver section prices, a season ticket holder would pay \$308.00 for one seat, most people usually buy two seats, and so they would pay \$616.00. That equates to 17% savings off the regular ticket price. Not everyone is willing to invest the time and money a season ticket holder does so for those who are further down the FE, a ten game flex pack would be more ideal. The Rush could offer to fans or potential fans to get any ten tickets for the price of nine, which would be a 10% discount. With this ticket package the ticket holder could go to two games with five people or five games with two people and so on. The ten game flex pack may not be a ticket promotion a nonfan would purchase right away, but it is a ticket promotion that they might consider once they have been introduced to an affordable Rush exhibition game, moving them up the FE. Although ticket packages are not new to sport marketers, making use of creative ticket promotions could be a beneficial strategy for the Rush as well as other NLL and mid-level professional sport teams to attract nonfans but still satisfy season ticket holders.

The next major finding of the research project relates to one of the main reasons the nonfan participants of this study do not attend Rush games: they do not know enough

about lacrosse. Lacrosse has a long history and is recognized as the official summer sport of Canada; however, it is always in the shadow of hockey. The Rush needs to educate the nonfans to create an awareness for them to want to attend a Rush game. Vail (2007) conducted a study which examined a model called: Building Tennis Communities (BTC). According to Vail (2007), BTC is “a community development approach based on three key elements: identifying a community champion, developing collaborative partnerships, and delivering quality sport programming” (p. 571). This model could be transferable to other sports. This model would be a beneficial model for the Rush to implement within the Edmonton community. The Rush would act as a community champion who is responsible for executing the other two key elements.

In the study conducted by Vail (2007), many partnerships were made with local schools. The champion would go into physical education classes at different schools and teach kids the fundamentals of tennis using modified tennis equipment. This is something that the Rush could implement as there is a modified version of lacrosse called intercrosse. Intercrosse is a non-contact form of lacrosse, using a completely plastic stick with a larger softer ball (Wikipedia, 2010c). Teaching lacrosse in the form of intercrosse would introduce kids to the sport and the equipment is affordable for the school or the Rush. Although there are over 200 elementary schools in Edmonton, the Rush may need to begin the program with only a few schools. For instance, using only elementary schools within a short distance from Rexall Place. This is an opportunity to get lacrosse into elementary schools. If lacrosse is not in the school curriculum children will not have the opportunity to be aware of the sport.

Another partnership that was common in the BTC model was with the

government (Vail, 2007). This is a partnership the Rush should exercise as well. As one participant mentioned, there is nowhere for people to play lacrosse recreationally. The Rush should work with the local and perhaps provincial governments (specifically the area of government that deals with sport, for example Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation) to get lacrosse nets in public parks. Many parks have football goal posts, soccer nets, baseball diamonds, basketball courts, outdoor hockey rinks with accessible nets, yet few, (if any) parks in Canada have accessible lacrosse nets. If these are made available maybe people will begin to play recreationally. This suggestion is similar to Vail (2007), who mentions that many community champions worked with the local government to clean up tennis courts around the community. The partnership with the government is also needed to try and promote the history and tradition of lacrosse throughout Edmonton. This could be done through commercials or even exhibits at arenas or museums. The partnership with government along with the schools assists with the delivery of quality sport programming, which is a goal many schools and governments want to accomplish as it helps the community stay healthy and active.

Not only are partnerships with the schools and government important but partnerships with local sponsors are also significant (Vail, 2007). Putting lacrosse nets in parks and implementing intercrosse in schools also comes with a price. Local sponsors can help offset some of the costs to run these programs. For instance, there are over 200 elementary schools in Edmonton; partnering with local sponsors may assist with the purchasing of equipment. It is not expected that 200 sets of equipment would be purchased but a few sets could get the program started. The implementation of the BTC model could be an advantageous marketing strategy for the Rush but could also assist

other teams in the NLL or other mid-level professional leagues and teams, such as the MLL, if participation in the particular sport is low. The BTC model is specific to tennis and its purpose is to increase tennis participation and interest. Its ability to be executed across different sports could be valuable to sport marketers.

An additional marketing strategy that the Rush could implement to create awareness about the team as well as the sport of lacrosse is by having open practices at Rexall Place where nonfans can learn the specifics about the game. According to Sutton et al. (1997), increasing team/player accessibility to the public as well as creating opportunities for group affiliation are great strategies for increasing fan identification. Open Rush practices could accomplish both of the techniques mentioned by Sutton et al. (1997). For instance, the Rush could recruit fans that are high on the FE and ask them to answer any questions new fans may have. This gives an affordable opportunity to potential new fans to learn about the sport of lacrosse and creates more awareness for the Rush. Although open practices are not new to sport marketers, this marketing strategy could still be applicable to other mid-level professional leagues. For instance mid-level professional leagues like the WNBA, MLL, or AFL could use open practices to not only create awareness but also create team/player accessibility as well as develop opportunities for group affiliation (Sutton et al., 1997).

Another interesting finding that was uncovered was that the Director of Marketing and Promotion, as well as owner Bruce Urban, kept stating that the seats in Rexall Place are not filled because the organization has yet to put a winning team on the floor. Yet the 2010 season was the most successful season the Rush has had since its inauguration but it did not translate into more ticket sales (Korobanik, 2010). That being said it was

recognized that although the Rush made it to their division finals, the Rush did not have any home playoff games which could have assisted in generating buzz for next season. In the regular season games the Rush were performing great, specifically at home games, yet none of the nonfans mentioned performance as a reason for not attending Rush games. This may have implications to what Fisher and Wakefield (1998) discovered that when performance of a team is low, fans seek alternative ways to connect with the team. However, it was also found that for those people who were used to their team being successful, winning was important (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). This is also significant to the current study because the nonfan participants who were Oilers fans are hockey fans of a successful team (with the exception of the 2009-2010 season), which means success could be important to them. Yet, the lack of discussion around the Rush's performance by the online participants of this study may suggest that the Rush along with other NLL franchises, should focus on varied marketing strategies to attract nonfans. Performance records alone should not be recognized by sport marketers as well as particular mid-level professional sport teams or leagues that struggle in attendance, as the only means to increase fan attendance or popularity.

The researcher believes that these recommendations need to be implemented first before the Rush can focus on other findings of this research. For instance other findings included changing the league structure and getting more television and media exposure. However, as discussed before these strategies could be difficult to implement if the Rush as well as the NLL cannot attract more fans. As an example, the Rush and the NLL do not have a television contract. However, it is difficult to get a television contract when the demand for the product is low. Television companies do not want to air something that

few people are going to watch. That being said, it is difficult to promote lacrosse and the Rush without the assistance of television as it can reach a mass audience. Moreover, some participants mentioned changing the league structure as well as having more games in the middle of the week. Yet, as stated previously, a majority of the players have fulltime careers outside of lacrosse and most of them do not reside in the city they play in, which is why the league plays a majority of games on weekends. Again, this cannot be changed until franchises can offer more money so players can play lacrosse fulltime and this will not happen until the league can attract more fans.

It is a vicious cycle that the Rush and the NLL are in. However, the findings suggest that starting with the suggested strategies, like focusing marketing techniques to attract nonfans as well as educate them to understand lacrosse, is a good start to breaking the cycle. Once this cycle is broken and the demand for lacrosse and the Rush begin to rise, more media will show an interest and perhaps the league can improve its structure and schedule. Moreover, the Rush can switch its focus from attracting nonfans to moving current fans up the FE and the PCM.

Reflexivity

With qualitative research it is important to recognize the potential impact of the researcher in conducting the study. As mentioned previously, Patton (2002) recognized the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research for the researcher to express his or her voice while interpreting the data, which he describes:

The qualitative analyst owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective; a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness; complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the

researcher's focus becomes balance - understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflective in consciousness (p. 41).

I kept a journal of thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. Moreover, as I moved through the research process, it was made sure that *Reflexive Triangulation* (Patton, 2002) and the three categories researchers use to display reflexivity developed by Potter (1996) as cited in Glesne (2006) were continuously referred to.

As a researcher I faced a few challenges throughout the research process that should be addressed. The first challenge I encountered related to the recruitment process. One major issue was going into the online forums of which I had never been a part of and asking people to participate in a study. I thought I was being perceived as an intruder and felt that I was pestering people on the forum. This was made a reality when one of the administrators from one of the forums requested that I stop asking people to participate in the study. This made me realize that if it were all to be done again I would enter these online forums long before the study was to begin and observe and participate in this online world. Therefore, it would help with gaining trust and rapport with those who may be interested in the study.

The next challenge occurred during the online focus group. I went through many highs and lows through this process. I believed that the online focus group would have more continuous flow; however, this was not the case. As questions were posted to the online focus group it would take some participants days to post. I emailed individual participants and the participants as a whole numerous times throughout this process to

ensure each subject were posting his/her opinion to each question. I had to send out many reminder emails which made me feel as though the numerous emails were annoying the participants.

The last challenge I faced was the constant feeling of worry that the whole process was going to fail. As this was a fairly new way of collecting data there was no real expert I could turn too. Throughout the five weeks of recruitment and the online focus group I always had an uneasy feeling that the research study would be unsuccessful. Some of my worries included: not having enough participants, participants dropping out of the study, and not collecting enough data. Although throughout the research process I was constantly reminded of these concerns, once the online focus group was complete, I realized that challenges do present themselves. Learning from them and correcting the challenges in the future is all a part of the research process.

Limitations and Delimitations

Throughout this study the researcher recognized a number of limitations and delimitations that will be acknowledged in this section. According to Glesne (2006), if a researcher is able to demonstrate the limitations and delimitations of one's study, it further demonstrates the trustworthiness of the research. The first limitation to this study was that the online focus group did not create as much data as expected. This could be correlated with the fact that, as mentioned previously, online focus groups have different dynamics than face-to-face focus groups. However, what was found was that participants were only answering the questions posted by the researcher and did not have many discussions between themselves and other subjects. The next limitation to this study was the fact that the researcher was a novice. If the researcher was more experienced or had

more practice at any type of focus group more follow-up questions could have been asked and that, in turn, would have enriched the data. The third limitation had to do with geographic and financial constraints. As the researcher did not have the financial means, flying to Edmonton and conducting a focus group was not an option. Therefore an online focus group was conducted. The fourth limitation acknowledged by the researcher was the fact that there were more males in the study than there were females. This could have distorted the results a bit as female and male opinions can differ. However, as screen names were used for the online focus group, the participants were unaware of who was male and who was female. The fifth limitation that will be recognized was the fact that the Rush had its best win-loss record ever, where the Oilers and Oil Kings arguably had each of their worst. The highs of a winning team as well as the lows of a losing team may have influenced responses specific to the 2009-2010 season. Another limitation included the limited access to information and resources regarding the NLL and Edmonton Rush which forced the researcher to rely on the internet as the main source of collecting information and resources. The sixth limitation recognizes that the participants were never introduced face-to-face to the researcher and this could have led to misunderstandings or the participants questioning the credibility of the study. Lastly, it was acknowledged that five of the ten participants were male aged 19 to 34. There was not much diversity within the ten participants which could have led to skewed results specific to that demographic.

The first delimitation of this study identifies that the participants were recruited online. This means the study only allowed for participants who had access to the internet as well as a computer, limiting the access for any persons to join. The next delimitation

involves the time of the study. Due to the fact that the researcher wanted to conduct the online focus group while all three teams were in-season the researcher decided upon the month of February. However the month of February was a busy month in terms of sports and this could have provided distractions to the participants. The 2010 Winter Olympic Games and Super Bowl were two potential distractions. Moreover, while the 2010 Olympics were happening, the NHL took a two week break. The third delimitation acknowledged was the fact that the researcher chose to use the Edmonton Rush because this organization had the lowest attendance figures of the Canadian franchises. The answers given may have been different if the researcher had chosen the overall worst NLL franchise in terms of attendance. The fourth delimitation was in regards to the researcher not observing and participating in the online forums prior to recruitment. This could have hindered finding the best possible participants as there was no rapport developed prior to recruitment. Lastly, the online focus group was not conducted in real time which may have changed the dynamics of the online focus group as participants did not respond right away as they would in a face-to-face focus group.

Overall, the data collection and analysis phases did present its challenges, but in the end it went well. Each collection method allowed the researcher to answer the primary research question (why do fans of the Oilers/Oil Kings choose not to attend games?) as well as answer the secondary research question (why do fans of the Rush attend games?). Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to understand how the Rush, the NLL, along with mid-level professional sport organizations can attract nonfans through the use of sport marketing approaches. Lastly, in regards to addressing the gap in knowledge for online research gathering tools, this research project provided the

researcher with recommendations that can be applied practically as well as academically. Although there were many new findings discovered through this study, further research still needs to be done in order to exercise the opportunities that nonfans, fans and online research methods present to the sport industry.

Conclusions and Future Research

Through an interpretivist lens the primary purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of nonfans of the Rush followed by the secondary purpose of understanding fans of the Rush. More specifically, this study wanted to understand the reasons why nonfans of the Oilers and Oil Kings decide not to attend Rush games and why fans attend Rush games. The study used an online focus group, a telephone interview, document collection and a demographic questionnaire. The use of these four different tactics allowed the researcher to uncover reasons why fans attend Rush games, but more importantly why nonfans decide not to attend Rush games. The researcher found that the Rush organization needs to direct its marketing efforts to nonfans by implementing a different marketing plan that focuses on aspects such as creating ticket packages and developing lacrosse awareness. Furthermore, performance records alone should not be recognized by the Rush as the only means to increase fan attendance and popularity. These suggestions may assist with solving attendance problems. The marketing strategies that focus on the nonfan need to be executed before the Rush can turn its attention to moving the current fan up the FE and PCM. In addition, these findings are not specific to the Rush and other NLL franchises but can be used to assist mid-level professional sport leagues or teams as well as contribute to the awareness of sport marketing practitioners and academics. The researcher also assisted with addressing

the gap in knowledge of online research gathering tools and found that online data collecting techniques can be very beneficial to all those involved with sport marketing.

This research study was specific to nonfans/fans in the Edmonton region. To further one's understanding of nonfans and fans of the NLL, a similar research study could be conducted on an American or Canadian team with poor attendance. Moreover, although findings from this study can be applicable to other mid-level professional leagues/teams, some characteristics of the Rush as well as the NLL cannot be generalized. Therefore conducting research on nonfans of other mid-level professional sport leagues and teams could further the understanding of the nonfans across different sports. The online focus group was an important component to this research study and online research gathering tools in general have been underutilized in sport marketing. Future research should explore the different options sport marketing practitioners and academics have in relation to online research gathering strategies. For instance as mentioned previously, using online data collection techniques, such as online interviews, to understand satellite fans (Kerr & Gladden, 2008) or distant fans (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2008; Foster & Hyatt, 2009). This research study attempted to address a few gaps in knowledge such as the nonfan, online research methods, and the management of lacrosse. Although the findings of this study have contributed to the sport marketing knowledge on nonfans, the management of lacrosse, mid-level professional sport leagues/teams and online research gathering tools, more research needs to be conducted on these areas in order to develop better marketing strategies.

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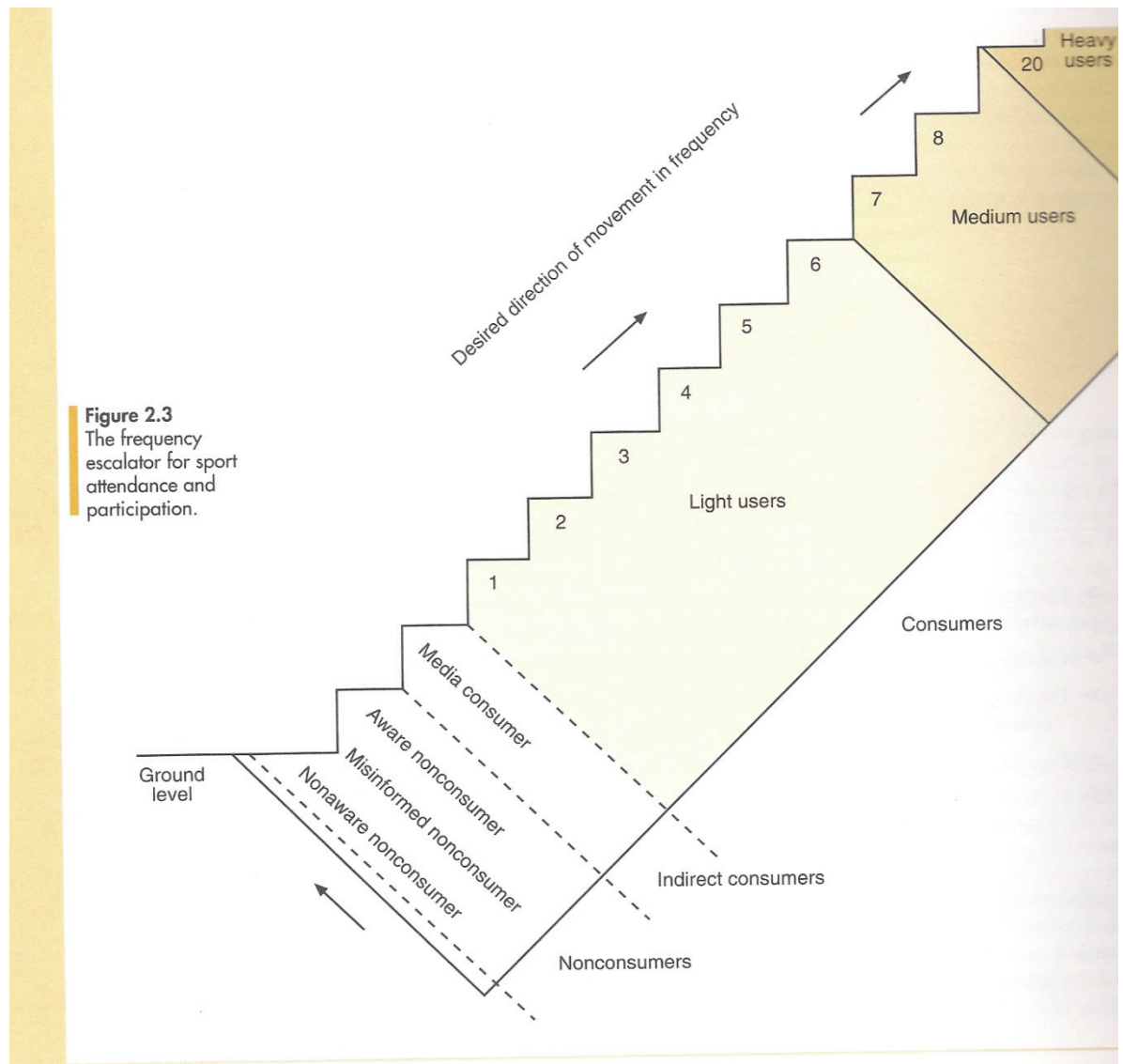
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Appendix A

The Frequency Escalator



Source: Mullin, B.J., Hardy, S., & Sutton, W. (2007). *Sport Marketing* (3rd ed.). Illinois: Human Kinetics.

Appendix B

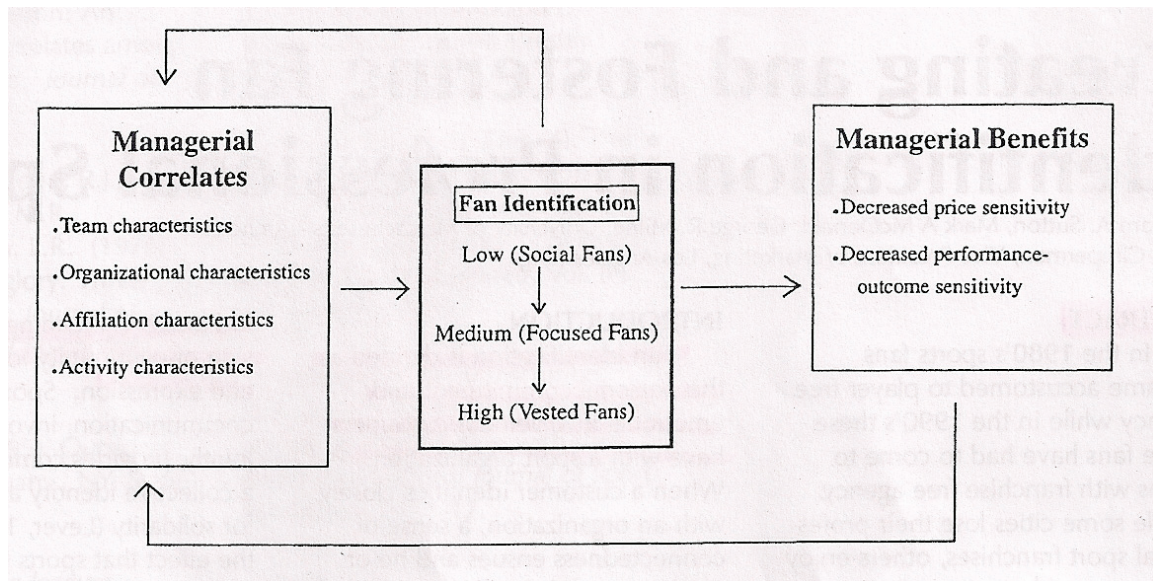
The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM)

Level of connection	Psychological characteristics
4 Allegiance	Intrinsic consistency – Intrinsic influences most important
3 Attachment	Intrinsic features – Personal importance and meaning
2 Attraction	Extrinsic/intrinsic features – Dispositional influences
1 Awareness	Extrinsic features – Socialising agents/media

Source: Funk, D.C., & James, J. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological connection to sport. *Sport Management Review*, 4, 119-150.

Appendix C

Conceptual Framework for Fan Identification



Source: Sutton, W.A., McDonald, M.A., Milne, G.R., & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and fostering fan identification in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 6(1), 15-22.

Appendix D

Opportunities and Challenges for Online Research Gathering Tools

Opportunities	Contributors
Low cost	Davis et al. (2004); Folkman Curasi (2001); O'Connor & Madge (2003)
Pre-test for traditional focus groups	Folkman Curasi (2001)
Not as time consuming	Burton & Bruening (2003); Davis et al. (2004); Folkman Curasi (2001); Kenny (2004); Kitto & Barnett (2007); Kvale & Brinkmann (2008); O'Connor & Madge (2003)
No transcribing	Burton & Bruening (2003); Davis et al. (2004); Folkman Curasi (2001); Kenny (2004); Kitto & Barnett (2007); Kvale & Brinkmann (2008); O'Connor & Madge (2003)
Limitless geographically	Burton & Bruening (2003); Davis et al. (2004); Folkman Curasi (2001); Kitto & Barnett (2007); O'Connor & Madge (2003)
Great for member checking	Folkman Curasi (2001)
Easily triangulated	Folkman Curasi (2001)
Ensures anonymity	Burton & Bruening (2003); Kenny (2004)

Challenges	Contributors
Non-verbal cues are missed	Burton & Bruening (2003); Davis et al. (2004); Folkman Curasi (2001); Kitto & Barnett (2007); O'Connor & Madge (2003)
Online group dynamics are weak	Burton & Bruening (2003); Folkman Curasi (2001); Kvale & Brinkman (2008)
One word answers	Burton & Bruening (2003); Folkman Curasi (2001); Kvale & Brinkman (2008)
Interviewer has less control	Folkman Curasi (2001)
Rapport difficulties	Folkman Curasi (2001); Kvale & Brinkmann (2008); O'Connor & Madge (2003)
Unknown distractions	O'Connor & Madge (2003)

Appendix E

Online Posts to Potential Participants

Post for fans of the Oilers and Oil Kings (separate websites)

Name of Thread: Edmonton Oilers/Oil Kings Fans Needed

Hello my name is Danielle Smith and I am a Masters student at Brock University in the Department of Sport Management. I am looking to recruit 10 dedicated Oilers/Oil Kings fans who also attend many games at the Rexall Place to support their beloved Oilers. My final research project is on fans and nonfans of the Edmonton Rush. Which means I am looking for true fans of the Oilers who attend games but do not attend games for the Rush. If you are interested in participating please let me know.

Post for fans of the Rush

Name of Thread: Edmonton Rush Fans Needed

Hello my name is Danielle Smith and I am a Masters student at Brock University in the Department of Sport Management. I am looking to recruit 20 dedicated Rush fans who also attend many games at the Rexall Place to support their beloved Rush. My final research project is on fans and nonfans of the Edmonton Rush. Which means I am looking for true fans of the Rush who attend games. If you are interested in participating please let me know.

Appendix F

Online Focus Group Questions

- 1) In order to ensure everyone feels comfortable I just want to start with a warm-up question. Tell us why you wanted to be a part of this study.
- 2) You have been selected because you are either a fan of the Rush or a fan of the Oilers or Oil Kings. Tell us how has the game of lacrosse or hockey impacted your life?
- 3) Tell us how did you become a fan of the Rush/Oilers/Oil Kings?
- 4) All of you are either Rush lacrosse fans or Oilers/Oil Kings hockey fans. Tell us why you are a fan of your team?
- 5) The Rush/Oilers/Oil Kings all play out of the Rexall Place. Have you ever been to a game other than the team you are a fan of? If so what was that experience like?
- 6) Tell us what you think differs from the culture of the Oilers/Oil Kings games to the Rush games?
- 7) Tell us why you choose not to attend Rush games OR why you think people may not want to attend Rush games?
- 8) What do you think the Rush or NLL can do to attract nonfans as fans OR make you an even more loyal fan?

Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire

Indicate on the four-point scale the level of fan identification you have for each for the following Edmonton sport teams:

Not a fan	Casual fan	Fairly committed fan	Die hard fan
1	2	3	4
Rush -	Oilers -	Oil Kings -	Eskimos -
			Capitals -
			Energy -

Place an X beside the option that best describes you

1) What is the distance from your residence to the Rexall Place?

- ☐ Less than 5km
- ☐ 6-10km
- ☐ 11-20km
- ☐ 21-50km
- ☐ 51-100km
- ☐ More than 100km

2) What is your age?

- ☐ 18 and under
- ☐ 19-35
- ☐ 36-50
- ☐ 51-65
- ☐ 65+

3) What is your household income?

- ☐ Below \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,000-\$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000-\$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000-\$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000-\$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000-\$199,999
- ☐ Above \$200,000

4) What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

5) What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ African Canadian
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ First Nations
- ☐ Other

6) What is your marital status?

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Other

7) What is your education?

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college/university
- ☐ College/university graduate
- ☐ Advanced degree holder (Master's/PhD)

8) What is your current occupation?
(Please fill in blank)

Appendix H

Information Consent Letter

Date: January 2010

Project Title: Getting Bums in Seats for the National Lacrosse League: A Study on Nonfans of the Edmonton Rush

Principal Investigator: Danielle Smith, Master of Arts' Student
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INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons why fans attend Rush games and why Oilers' and Oil Kings' fans decide not to attend Rush games.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to be involved with an online focus group with 40 other participants. As a participant you will be expected to partake in answering questions that have been posted by the researcher and be actively involved with the overall discussion of the focus group. As a participant you may post your thoughts whenever it is convenient for you, it is just asked that you make time to be involved with the discussion every few days for four weeks. Furthermore, the researcher may follow-up throughout the four weeks with one-on-one e-mail questions. This online focus group will begin on a specific day in January. Participation will take approximately five weeks of your time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

Possible benefits of participation includes giving people a chance to feel that their voice is being heard in our society by participating in this research study. They are active in the construction of social science research and learning. The potential risks of this study involve the idea that there could be the potential for uncivil comments posted online. However everyone who posts something online knows that there is the potential for uncivil comments.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Anonymity of participants will be maintained throughout the whole research process. Furthermore as all contact with participants will be conducted online the researcher will never be able to fully identify the participants. However all data collected from participants will only be used for the present study and they will be kept confidential throughout the process.

Data collected during this study will be stored on the researcher's personal laptop

computer, which has a password to require access. When the data from the focus group is printed, it then will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office. Data will be kept for four years after which time the data will be shredded and recycled. Access to this data will be restricted to Danielle Smith (researcher), Dr. Craig Hyatt (co-supervisor), Dr. Cheri Bradish (co-supervisor), and Dr. Danny Rosenberg (committee member).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available from Danielle Smith via e-mail once the research study has been completed.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator or the Faculty Supervisor (where applicable) using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (09-131 HYATT). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca. Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time. By replying to this e-mail I acknowledge that I am participating in this study and that I am providing informed consent.

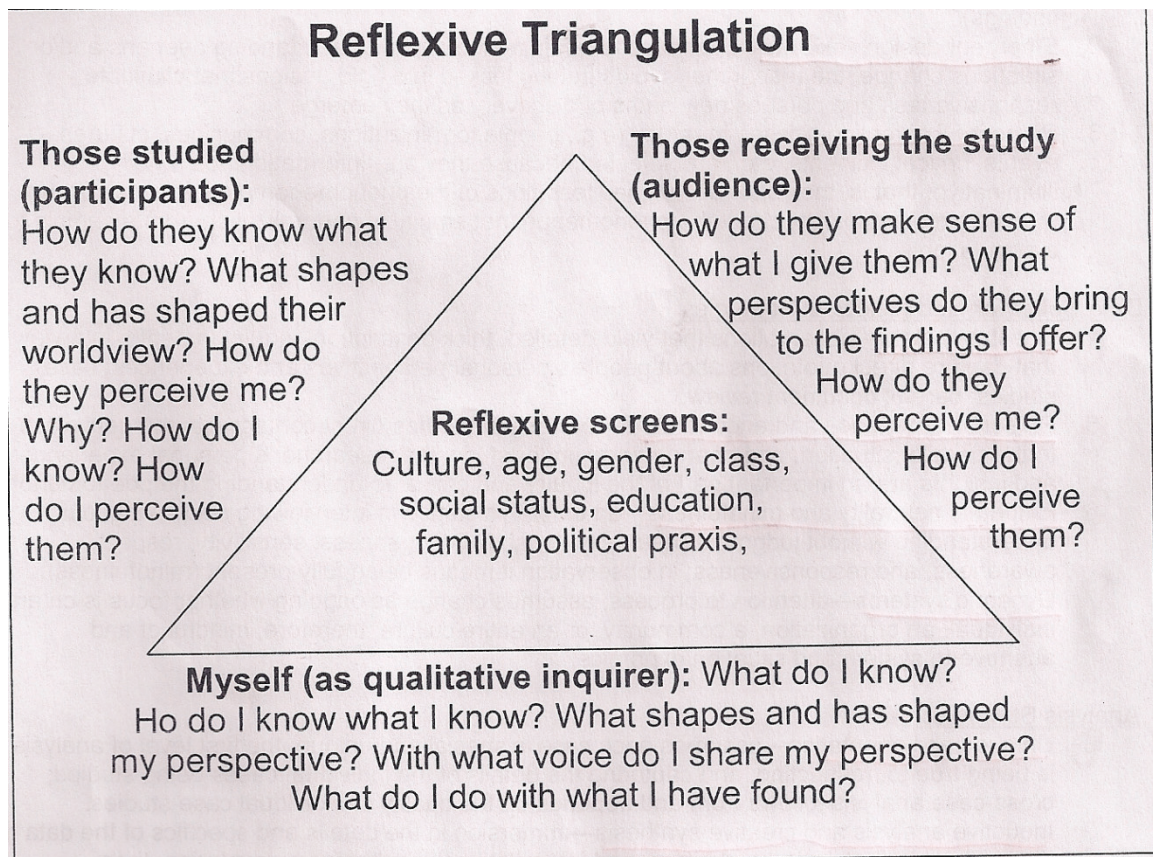
Appendix I

Telephone Interview Questions

- 1) How did you first become involved with the Edmonton Rush?
- 2) What is it like to be the Director of Marketing and Promotions for the Rush?
- 3) What type of marketing and promotion techniques does the Rush use?
- 4) For the marketing and promotions department what are some of the challenges to the marketing efforts? And successes?
- 5) Does the Rush have any future plans to further build on its fan base and attract more nonfans?

Appendix J

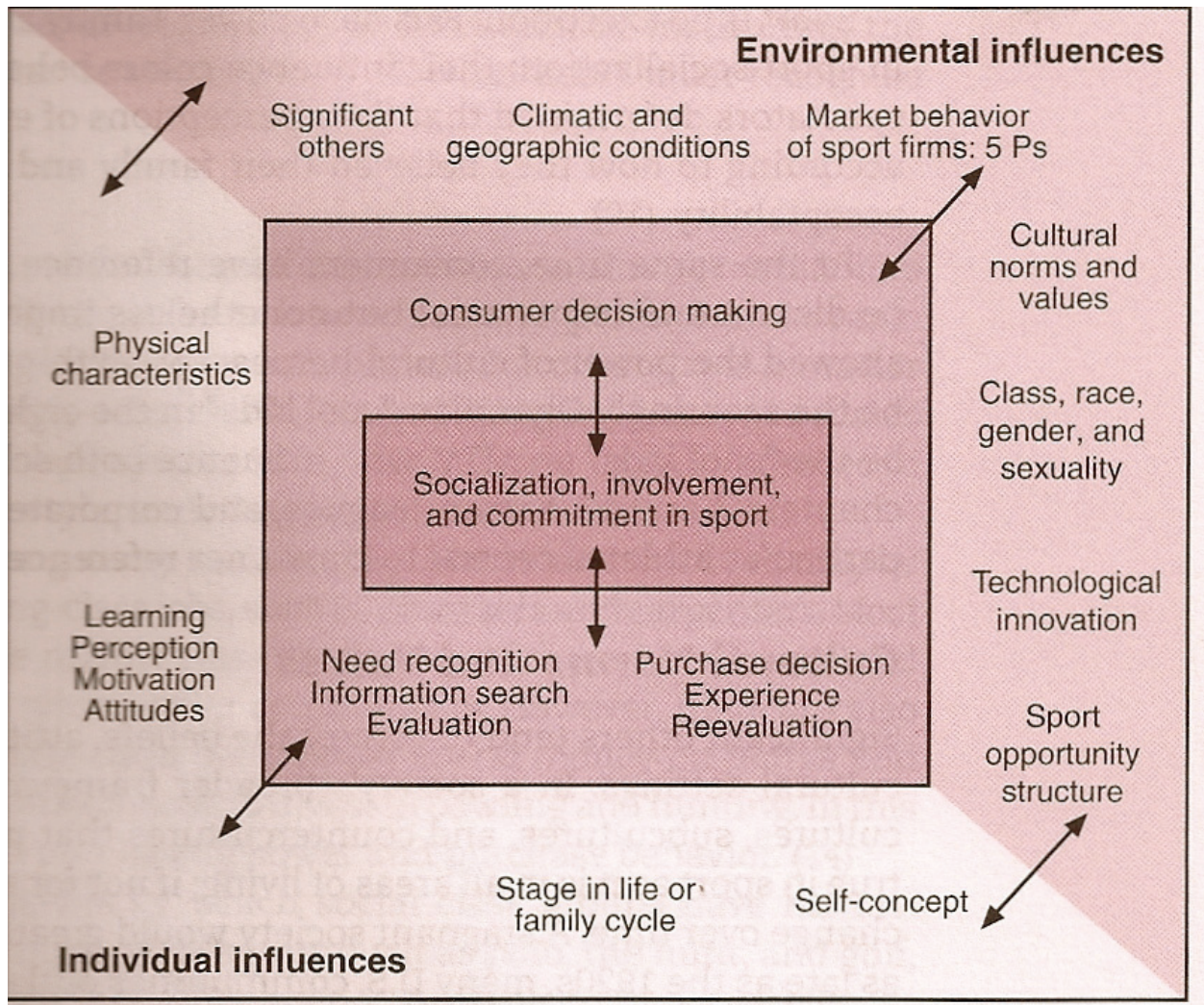
Reflexive Triangulation



Source: Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix K

Consumer Behaviour in Sport



Source: Mullin, B.J., Hardy, S., & Sutton, W. (2007). *Sport Marketing* (3rd ed.). Illinois: Human Kinetics.

Appendix L

Fan Profile for the Online Focus Group

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Fan Type for: Rush Oilers Oil Kings	Distance to Rexall Place	Household Income	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
Finn	Male	50-64	Die hard fan Not a fan Casual Fan	6-10 km	\$100,000-\$149,999	Caucasian	Married	Some college/university	Engineering technologist
Frank	Male	19-34	Die hard fan Die hard fan Casual fan	6-10 km	\$20,000-\$49,999	Caucasian	Single	Some college/university	Sales representative
Forrest	Male	19-34	Fairly committed fan Casual fan Not a fan	6-10 km	\$20,000-\$49,999	Asian	Single	Some college/university	Quality Assurance
Fred	Male	35-49	Die hard fan Casual fan Not a fan	6-10 km	\$100,000-\$149,999	Caucasian	Married	College/university graduate	Instructor
Nancy	Female	19-34	Not a fan Fairly committed fan Not a fan	11-20 km	\$20,000-\$49,999	Caucasian	Married	Advanced degree holder	Policy Analyst
Norm	Male	19-34	Not a fan Die hard fan Casual fan	Less than 5 km	\$100,000-\$149,999	Caucasian	Single	Some college/university	Pipeline Operator
Nathaniel	Male	19-34	Not a fan Die hard fan Casual fan	Less than 5 km	\$50,000-\$79,999	Caucasian	Single	High school graduate	New vehicle sales
Ned	Male	19-34	Not a fan Die hard fan Casual fan	6-10 km	\$20,000-\$49,999	Other	Single	Some college/university	Front desk at a hotel
Natalie	Female	18 & under	Not a fan Fairly committed fan Die hard fan	11-20 km	\$50,000-\$79,999	Caucasian	Single	High school graduate	Flyer force carrier
Neil	Male	18 & under	Not a fan Die hard fan Fairly committed fan	11-20 km	\$50,000-\$79,999	Caucasian	Single	Some high school	Unemployed

*All names that begin with the letter F are participants who are fans of the Rush. All names that begin with the letter N are participants who are nonfans of the Rush.

Appendix M

Implications and Recommendations

Implication/Recommendation	Specific to...
Online research gathering tools have endless opportunities for practitioners and academics alike	Rush, NLL, Mid-level professional leagues/teams, Sport marketing (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Foster & Hyatt, 2008; Kerr & Gladden, 2008)
Specific marketing strategies for nonfans included in the overall marketing plan. Have a focus on nonfans as well as season ticket holders	Rush, NLL, Mid-level professional leagues/teams, Sport marketing (Mullin et al., 2007)
Ticket packages that are creative and attract nonfans but also do not upset the season ticket holder	Rush, NLL, Some mid-level professional leagues/teams (Snipes & Ingram, 2007)
Utilize preseason games. Offer cheap tickets for nonfans to entice them to check out a game without the price risk.	Rush, NLL, Mid-level professional leagues/teams
Create lacrosse or specific sport awareness through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of the Building Tennis Communities Model using lacrosse/or other specific sport - Open practices to allow nonfans to learn about the sport. Have current fans act as super fans to teach the sport within the stands 	<p>Rush, NLL, Mid-level professional leagues/teams, Sport marketing (Vail, 2007)</p> <p>Rush, NLL, Some mid-level professional leagues/teams (Sutton et al., 1997)</p>
Performance records alone should not be recognized by the Rush as the only means to increase fan attendance and popularity. Winning cannot be controlled. Need effective marketing strategies like the ones above to attract nonfans/create more loyal fans	Rush, NLL, Some mid-level professional leagues/teams, Sport marketing (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998)
League structure- Mid-week games or opportunities for home playoff games.	Rush, NLL, Some mid-level professional leagues/teams
Media exposure. Go above and beyond to attempt to get your league/team recognized within the community/province/country.	Rush, NLL, Some mid-level professional leagues/teams